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MAMA'S BANK ACCOUNT

Transfer Point

Kathryn Forbes

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Chapter One

ALLIE BARTON rushed along Mission Street as quickly as the pain in her side would let her. Once she reached 16th Street, she could rest. Could rest, that was, if the Number 22 street-car wasn't there. If it was waiting, she'd have to pile on with the crowd. (Crowds and transfer points were very important when you were trying to ride free.)

The Number 22 *was* waiting. Allie rounded the corner and ran the last few steps desperately. She made an oblique approach to the line of people, wriggled in front of the fat lady with the two string shopping bags, and jumped onto the platform. (It was also important, in riding free, to be among the first passengers.)

She had slipped past the conductor and the coin-box, had almost reached the center of the car, when the conductor yelled at her. Allie tried to disregard the shout, but she knew from experience it wouldn't work. Once conductors yelled, "Where's your fare, little girl?"—they had to follow through. It was a point of conductor's honor, or something.

Hopefully, she tried the second move in this game.

"My mother's got my transfer," she yelled back. Sometimes this worked; sometimes you got to ride as many as four blocks before being put off.

The conductor was evidently an old hand at this business. He prodded a thumb over his shoulder at the still-boarding passengers.

"Your mother wear trousers?" he wanted to know.

Allie looked, and conceded defeat. There were no women in the waiting crowd. Making her breath come very fast, she looked wistfully at the fat lady, but the fat lady just glared.

"She ain't mine," she told the conductor. "My kids wouldn't pull a trick like that."

Allie didn't believe her. All kids tried to ride free. She had heard lots of mothers, especially mothers like the stout lady, instructing their kids to "sneak ahead." Allie, herself, always joined such maneuvers; four or five kids scrambling on at once gave one an excellent chance.

"Come on, come on," the conductor held his hand on the bell-rope. "Come on—off with you."

Allie felt the red of shame creep up her throat and onto her cheeks. She left the car, walked over to the drugstore on the corner, and stared hard at the display in the window until she heard the street-car clang away.

Until today, riding free had been just a game to save one's nickel to buy an ice-cream cone or licorice whips. You made the attempt, remembering to look absent-minded, but you kept the nickel clutched in your hand. If caught, you then deposited the nickel in the coin-box with a great show of surprise. And no matter what the conductor *thought*, he couldn't say much; fare had been paid. But today, when it was so important to get home in a hurry—when you were hours late—there was no nickel for the emergency.

She waited anxiously for another 22. But when it arrived, she could see that working-men were the only ones boarding it. It was nearly five o'clock; the ladies must all be home cooking dinner. She searched the gutter for a stray transfer, but the only one she found was punched, "Not Good After 2 P.M."

Allie gave up, momentarily, and started walking again. She'd try at Haight and Fillmore Streets; that was a transfer point.

There might be a lady getting on there that she could pretend to accompany.

The first block, Allie stepped right along. She was a soldier, marching in triumph down Market Street in the Armistice Day parade she had seen last year. She held her head high and pushed her flat chest out as far as it would go, so the welcoming populace could see the many medals. From time to time she bowed graciously to the imaginary throng. "Left, left," she sang to herself as she marched, "had a good job that I left, left . . . *mighty* fine job that I left, left. . . ."

Her steps lagged. She was tired. And late. So late, really, that it was foolish to try so hard to make better time. Mother and Aunt Lottie would be so mad by now, a few extra minutes couldn't help much. And Allie knew she didn't have a good excuse.

Someone had drawn a hop-scotch on the sidewalk. She stopped to try it out. The lines weren't even, and the squares were lopsided. She could draw a better hop-scotch than that in her sleep. If she had a piece of chalk she'd scribble a "P-U-N-K" on it. She searched her pockets, but without energy.

Allie walked on, passed the Uneeda Biscuit Company, and wished she had a handful of cookies. And as long as she was wishing, she wished for a handful of the frosted ones—pink-and white-frosted ones, and no fig newtons.

She stopped at the next corner. This was a short block coming up. She would run. Not fast, but rhythmically, like the marathon runners in ancient times. As she jogged along, she practiced saying her excuse.

"There was—this new—little girl—at school—and *she*—invited *me*—" Allie said the words over again to see if they came out poetry, but just the middle part did, so she continued: "She—invited me—to her home—to play—this aft."

Allie attained the curb, stopped for breath. Breath was a very funny thing. She remembered last year, when she was a little

girl, and had tried to take the Page Street turn on one skate and had fallen flat on her stomach. She'd thought, at first, that that was death.

A lady, passing by, had said: "Get up, little girl, your drawers are showing."

Allie had gasped that she couldn't get up; she was dead.

"Nonsense," the lady had said. "You've just had the breath knocked out of you."

Allie had decided then that this must be what dying was like—that no-breath feeling. And had wondered if it would be possible to save up extra breath for that day? For weeks she practiced breathing lightly and slowly, but gave it up when she considered that grown-ups would have discovered that fact, if it were true, and instructed you accordingly. The way they did about never, never putting your mouth directly against a drinking fountain, being very careful crossing streets, and never sitting down on strange toilets.

Allie continued homeward, making the next block a rest block—but no fair stepping on lines. She practiced saying her excuse again.

"I didn't know this new girl lived way out in the Mission. We rode there on her car-tickets; and honest, it didn't seem far on the street-car."

No. It didn't sound too good. What if she said, "This new girl comes from a very fine family. Her father is strictly a union man . . .?"

Uh-uh. That might do if one were telling Father the excuse, but it would just make Mother cross. Mother hated unions; she said they caused more trouble than they were worth. When Father had lived with them, he'd tried awfully hard to make Mother understand about Unions, the Working Man, and Brotherhood.

Allie missed her father. It had been two months—way last August, during school vacation—since she'd seen him; since it

had been his turn to have her. She could have told him the truth: that the new girl had said her name was "Arab." He might have understood that Allie had to find out what sort of family would give their little girl such an outstanding, exotic name.

The afternoon certainly hadn't been worth the what-for that Allie was going to get. "Arab" had turned out to be really named Arabella, and the magic had departed.

Arabella's mother had been one of those "What-does-your-father-do-little-girl-and-why-doesn't-he-live-with-you-and-your-mother?" ladies.

Since Allie had taken the blood vow never to say out loud that Father and Mother were *separated*, she lied: "He cannot live with us." Then she had added, experimentally, "You see, he's over in Egypt. He's an Egyptian."

Arabella's mother got satisfactorily wide-eyed at that one.

"Egyptian? *Egyptian*? But I thought you said your name was Barton."

"It is," Allie had admitted, "but *his* name is really Kallikrates."

That had been the mistake—the "Kallikrates" part. She never dreamed that Arabella's mother might have seen Sir Rider Haggard's *She*, that the moving-picture might have played at the Mission nickelodeon, too.

"Indeed," Arabella's mother had said. "Indeed. Well, little girl, you just march along home. Your mother wants you. Maybe she likes raising little liars. We don't like little liars in this house."

My, but she'd been cross. And when Allie turned to go, Arabella's mother had made her voice loud as she shouted after her: "And for your further information, little lady, Egyptians are *colored*!"

Allie hadn't minded having to leave. She'd known long before the Kallikrates part that Arabella would never make a Best Friend. And Allie was very grateful to know about Egyptians being colored. She'd change the Kallikrates story around and

make her father Persian. She must look up Persians in the dictionary. . . .

Only two more blocks to go, now, to Haight and Fillmore. She'd start this block with the left foot; that was always lucky. Hadn't that been a wonderful moving-picture, that *She?* Allie had stayed at the nickelodeon from matinee-time right straight through two showings. If Aunt Lottie hadn't come after her, she'd have seen it three times.

The beautiful, beautiful lady—before she'd turned into a mummy, then a skeleton, then actual *dust*—had kept saying, according to the titles on the screen: "Kallikrates, ah, Kallikrates, my lover . . ."

Allie said it aloud now, just the way a beautiful Egyptian queen would say it: "Kallikrates, ah, Kallikrates. . . ."

Two ladies, passing by, stopped to smirk. "Talking to yourself?" one inquired.

Allie made her face mournful. "I was saying"—she made her voice deep, and mournful, too—"I was saying—my prayers."

The ladies looked flustered, even impressed, and walked on. Allie imagined their conversation.

"Wasn't that sweet?" one would ask the other.

"Yes, sister." (Allie made them sisters immediately.) "Yes, sister, such a spiritual thing as that makes one realize how, even in this sinful world, one sometimes meets little saints—"

Allie stopped imagining, shocked at herself. My goodness, she shouldn't bandy religious things around like that; God would get angry.

"I'm sorry," she told God respectfully, "but they made me mad. It won't be a lie, though, because I'll say You a prayer right now, and I won't gabble it."

Carefully, she considered which prayer to say. She knew an awful lot of them; she'd tried practically every Sunday-school in the city. She made her choice, said the prayer, and gave it all the

dramatic intensity she was capable of. "There you are, Sir," she told God, and walked on.

Now she was at Waller Street, and half-way up the block were the Waller-Arms apartments; and, in spite of her efforts to hurry past, she found she had to walk slow. She hated, *hated* passing it. Once, they had all lived together there—Mother, Father, and Allie. They had been a family. They'd even had a grandmother who came to visit, overnight. And—No. She wouldn't think of that time; she *wouldn't*.

She would recite poetry to keep from remembering. "Lars Porsena of Clusium, by the nine gods he swore. . . ." That didn't help. She felt too mean to say beautiful words. So she sang, softly and to herself, the only dirty song she knew, the parody to *Pretty Baby*: "When you wake up in the morning and you find your bed is wet, blame the baby, blame the baby. . . ."

And here at last were Haight and Fillmore Streets. There were just a few transfer passengers standing around, and Allie needed a really good crowd, so she perched herself on the fire-plug to wait, and watched the newsboys call their extras.

"Wuxtree, wuxtree, all about the glub gleebl glanny . . ."

She supposed newsboys practiced that way of yelling. Because some of the words were clear. One could always understand: "All about the—." She stretched her neck to try to see the black headlines. Something about President Wilson . . . The newsboy saw her looking and flipped the paper over so she couldn't see any of it.

"See, see," he jeered, "what'd ya see?"

"A horse's head where his tail should be," Allie retorted, then looked the other way, pretending not to hear the vulgar words he mouthed at her. Besides, he wasn't saying any new words. She had heard every one of those before.

It was beginning to get gray-dark now, and wisps of fog were rolling in. Mother and Aunt Lottie would give her the dickens. . . .

Allie watched the busy-ness that was Haight and Fillmore. Funny that she didn't know more about this corner, when she had lived just half a block away for—how long had they been at the Waller-Arms apartments?

Allie was ten now, so she must have been five years old when they moved there. She remembered starting school at the Hearst Grammar. . . . Yes, she *had* been five, because Mother had to tell a story about Allie's age, make her a whole year older, so the school authorities would let her enter.

"She's big for her age," Mother had said to Father. "How are they going to know she's not six?"

Father had been cross. "Isn't the child growing up fast enough? Must you take a year out of her babyhood?"

"You're the one who's always bragging how pre—precocious she is, how smart. Well, if she's so smart it would be good for her to be in school, wouldn't it?"

"You're planning something, Lillian. You've been restless for a long time. I expected something like this. . . ."

"Now be reasonable, Harry. I could pack a lunch for Allie. She could stay right there at the school and be taken care of from nine until three."

"And what would you be doing?"

"Lottie thinks she can get me on extra at the Bon Ton. I could learn all about the cloak and suit business, get me some experience. Lottie would be right there to show me. . . ."

Father had said he was not going to have his wife working.

Mother said maybe his wife wouldn't have to work if she had a husband who wasn't always neglecting his own work for the Brotherhood of Man and Union Solidarity. . . .

Father started to explain again about unionism. He always did. He always started very patiently, too. And Mother always argued back.

"Unions, unions, Harry. I'm sick of hearing about them. I'm

sick of the men who are always coming here to talk about unions. They're shabby, they're failures. Going around with them will never get you anywhere and you know it. That's what keeps you from going ahead. The bosses know you're Union, and they shy off you. It's a shame, Harry. An educated man like you, with your personality, your background—"

"The poor devils need someone to talk up for them, Lillian; they—"

"Listen, they don't need anything but slogans: 'Organize! Demand! Strike!' I tell you I'm sick of it."

"And how sick do you think *they* get of working their hearts out for miserable wages? How sick do you think they get of watching their families starve during long lay-offs? How do you think they—"

"They're never satisfied. No matter what they get. Two years ago you promised me you'd give up this union business. 'Just wait until compulsory compensation goes through,' you kept saying to me. Well—it went through, Harry. And where are you? Still in the thick of union work."

"Lillian, you don't even try to understand. You don't know what we're trying to do, what we're fighting for. *You* aren't even interested in suffrage."

"I don't know about unions? Don't ever forget, Harry, that your own wife was hurt in the carmen's strike. That finished me and unions."

"You weren't hurt. Oh, all right, your hand was scratched. And you had no business being on that street-car."

Mother had told the story again and again. For a long time, Allie had thought she must have been with Mother that day on the street-car. She thought she could remember the cobblestone that came through the window, that showered glass all over Mother's hand. Allie was sure that she, too, had been terribly frightened when everyone had to hustle off the car. She was positive she'd heard Mother say to the angry men: "I am Harry

Barton's wife," and the strikers answering: "By God, lady, if you are, you oughtta have more sense than to ride a strike-bound car."

And plain as day, Allie could remember Mother answering, reasonably: "But I'm going to visit my cousin in the Potrero, and it's much too far to walk."

Then came the awful part. Allie could see it very clear in her mind. The strikers trussing up the motorman and conductor who had been scabbing, and tying them with a long rope to the back fender of the street-car; one of the strikers starting the street-car, then jumping off. And the empty car careening down the street, and the two bound men bumping along behind—like dummies. Except that they started bleeding. . . .

"I was there! I was there, too! I saw it all!" Allie had said once.

"Don't be silly," Mother had answered crossly. "You weren't even born. It happened two years before you were born."

"The youngster's heard the story so many times," Father had said, "naturally she thinks she was there."

"Yes? Well, I'll tell the story again and again. Every time you tell me how wonderful the unions are. Harry, those men were badly hurt."

"Those men were professional strike-breakers, brought in to San Francisco to fight. You don't stop to think what *they* did. Lillian, you know I've never countenanced violence; but, my God, you forget what that strike was about. Do you remember what those poor carmen were striking for? Three dollars a day—an eight-hour day."

"Well, they lost the strike."

Father had sighed wearily. "Yes, they lost. We almost always lose. . . ."

Allie had waited a while, to see if Mother and Father were going to get back to the interesting discussion of her going to

school. Evidently they weren't, and she had heard this union talk before, so she had wandered into Grandma's room.

It wasn't really Grandma's room, it was the dining-room. But the times that Grandma—who was Father's mother—came down from Reedstown, she slept on the bed that was hidden behind the false sideboard, the bed that came right down out of the wall. Grandma had her own fine house up in Reedstown, up in the mountains, but Allie had never seen it. Wasn't it odd that she had never seen the town where everything had happened to her family? Where her father had been born; where her mother had gone to visit, as a young girl, and stayed to marry her father; where her very own grandfather—Grandma's husband—had been the biggest man in town; where her brothers had been born—and had been buried. . . . Mother would never go back to Reedstown—wouldn't even talk about the town—because of the things that had happened to her there.

Grandma had been sitting in the rocking-chair, reading her Bible. She had looked up and smiled at Allie, and closed the book gently. Grandma did everything gently.

"Mother and Father are fighting again," Allie had said to Grandma.

"Quarreling," Grandma corrected. "Fighting is with fists. Ladies and gentlemen do not 'fight.'"

Grandma knew so many rules of life. Some of them were little rhymes, like, "Horses sweat, men perspire, ladies are all in a glow."

"Grandma, are you a lady?" she had asked.

"Yes." Grandma had said, "Yes." And that was the very nicest thing about Grandma; that she never qualified her statements. *She* was the one who would always give the direct "Yes" or "No."

When Allie couldn't hear the loud voices any more, she had wandered back to the front room to see what had been decided

about school. Mother was sitting quietly and she sounded very, very reasonable.

"I'm no chicken, Harry. I may never have another chance to work into the business world, to get experience. All I know now is cooking and sweeping and scrubbing—things any Chinaman can do. I think I'd like cloaks and suits, learning how to sell. I'd like meeting the public, talking to people. And we could use the money. . . ."

"Be patient a little longer, Lillian. I promise you . . . There's a party I'm to see—"

"You and your 'parties'; you're always meeting them. In saloons, mostly."

"Don't you think I'm ambitious, too? Don't you think I want a decent house for you—maybe in the Western Addition—and a garden for Alice to play in? Don't you think I want to see you dressed in fine style?"

"Sure you want it, Harry. A bird of paradise, maybe, for my hat, too? And while you're dreaming, we're stuck here—in the Waller-Arms. And the kitchen is nothing but a dark closet, and the smell of the chloride of lime I have to sprinkle around is just a little better than the smell when I don't. And all the gas pipes have to be soaped up to keep from leaking; and the fleas get into the carpet, and no sweeping in the world can get them out."

Father had been silent, then, for a long time. And Mother had said, as if it were all settled, "First money I get, I'm going to buy a pair of those high-laced shoes—champagne colored. I think I'll get Allie a pair of those buttoned white-top ones—the ones with tassels. Harry, don't you think that would be cute?"

"Cute!" Father had said angrily. "You talk about shoes. And I'm thinking about Alice having another year of childhood. It isn't time to put her into school, to make her grow up. Lillian, you're always forcing time. Why must you—"

"Your mother will hear you shouting, Harry."

Father had lowered his voice. "Always forcing a situation, always hurrying things along. Nothing ever comes to fruition naturally with you. No cake rises unaided in *your* oven—"

Mother had looked surprised. "Why, Harry, I never open the oven door when I'm cooking cakes. They'd fall."

Father had pounded his hand, softly, on the golden-oak table. "I cannot get used to it," he had said. "I come up against it time after time after time—and I cannot get used to it. That blank, that awful, that *utter* literalness of yours . . ."

"Oh, stop making a speech," Mother said. "And you know I make very good cakes. Once you get over thinking you're too good to have your wife go to work, things will be better. You're no longer living in a town that was named for your grandfather. Just the way you're not twenty years old any more. You're down in San Francisco now, Harry, and you're close to forty years old. And you're an ornamental plasterer who works for wages—when he works."

Father had stood up. "I'm going out. I have to see—"

"I know. You have to see a party about something or another. But *is* it settled, Harry? I can put Allie into school? She'll be safe there until after three o'clock. Then she can play right around the apartment house here. I'll get Mrs. Kronen to keep an eye on her."

"It's not Mrs. Kronen's job to watch Alice. It's yours, Lillian."

Mother's voice got high and tight. "I'm not a very good watcher," she'd said. "Remember, Harry?"

"Lillian. Lillian, don't—"

"I'm the mother who let one baby—"

"Lillian, stop! No one ever blamed you . . . please stop."

"And my other little boy . . ." Mother turned away, crying as if her heart would break. Allie guessed Mother's heart did break, every time she thought of her boys. Father didn't argue any more. He never did, once Mother spoke of the sons they had

lost so tragically, so needlessly; the sons who had been born, and lived, and died—before Allie was even thought of. . . .

"I'm sorry." Mother had stopped crying. "But sometimes . . . I'm not like you and your mother, Harry. I can't settle down—be content with books, with talk. I've got to be *doing* something; I've got to keep busy. There's too much time to think."

"Lillian . . . it's been fifteen years."

"Fifteen years," Mother had repeated somberly. "Fifteen years, or fifteen months, or fifteen days; what does that matter? It's always the same."

"All right," Father had sighed. "Try working, Lillian. If you think it will help. . . ."

Allie had started first grade the next Monday. Mother made her lunch—two fried egg sandwiches—and walked the two blocks to school with her. They'd been an hour early, because Mother had to go all the way downtown after she'd left Allie. Luckily, the school-yard door was open.

Mother set her on one of the benches. "Now listen, Allie. This is important. Your father thinks you are too young to go to school by yourself. But you're not. And it means that Mother gets her chance to work into the business world. And I'll get us some decent clothes—I'll be able to get them practically wholesale. And I'll get you some shoes with tassels. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. How will I know when it is time to go into the building?"

"A bell will ring. Now the important thing is that you are going to have to cross two streets going home—Waller and Hermann. You're to stand at the curb and wait for some grown-up and cross with them. Understand?"

"Yes. Will the people let me into the school building when the bell rings?"

"Do pay attention, Allie," Mother had begged. "This is im-

portant. If anything happened to you, your father would blame me. Now *will* you be careful?"

"Yes."

"Maybe you'd better pick out a woman. Don't be afraid to go right up and ask nicely if you can cross with her. And remember, when you go into the school, and they ask your birth-date, you give them the slip I wrote out. March 20th, 1908."

"I'll remember, Mother. 'Two years after the Fire and Earthquake,' I'll say."

"Never mind your embroidering, Allie. Just don't say anything. You start getting fancy and they'll know it's a story."

Mother had hurried off, and Allie had sat dutifully on the hard bench until a bell rang.

But things had not gone the way Mother had said they would. The lady in the room marked PRINCIPAL said, "Where's your vaccination slip, Alice?" And because Allie didn't have a little pink slip she wasn't allowed even to enter the room. So she'd gone back to the yard and sat on the bench. She'd sat there all day, during four bells, and watched the children at recess and at lunch. She'd eaten her sandwiches at the second bell; by the time the last bell rang for dismissal, Allie was hungrier than she could ever remember being.

She'd gotten across Hermann Street immediately, helping a lady lift a baby-carriage up and down the curbs; but at Waller Street she'd had to wait and wait for a grown-up.

When she'd rung the bell of Mrs. Kronen's apartment, Mrs. Kronen had said, "I've got some unexpected company, honey. You sit there at the head of the stairs and be real quiet. I'll look out at you from time to time. Your mama locked up your apartment. She doesn't want you in there alone." Mrs. Kronen had nodded her boudoir-capped head kindly. "She worries. On account of matches, and fire."

Mother had been so happy and excited when she'd come home. All the time she hurried around fixing dinner for Allie and

Father, she told interesting little stories about the store and the customers. She got white with anger when she found out about the school authorities and vaccination.

"There goes my chance. My chance to be a business woman, to know something. So now I'll have to stay home and keep on cooking and scrubbing and fighting dirt and going without things. Why don't I remember not to ever expect things to go right for me? Not even once!"

"Why don't you have Alice vaccinated? It *is* a protection. And if the schools insist—" Father had started to say.

"Never!" Mother had screamed it. "I won't lose this one through a doctor's bungling . . ."

Mother had taken Allie to school the next morning, and waited to see the principal. But all Mother's talking wouldn't make the lady take Allie into the school without the pink slip that showed she'd been vaccinated.

"It's a law, Mrs. Barton. The board of health will do it free. There's nothing to it, you know, it's a very simple procedure—"

"Anything that tampers with a child's blood stream isn't simple. What if the doctor's drunk? What if he's had a fight with his wife that morning?"

"Really, Mrs. Barton—"

"I know all about doctors," Mother had said angrily. "And children do get ill from vaccinations. They get feverish, their arms get sore."

In final exasperation the Principal lady had stood up and said, "I don't make the school laws, Mrs. Barton. I just know that every child that enters school must be vaccinated. Only the Christian Scientists' children are exempt."

Mother had smiled widely, happily. "*We* are Christian Scientists."

And she'd kept on saying it, too, stubbornly, all the time the Principal argued and asked questions and tried to catch Mother. When she found she couldn't get Mother to change her story,

she had to let Allie—and she did it grudgingly—into Room 1-A.

The very next Sunday, of course, Allie had to go to the Christian Science Sunday-school out on Stanyan Street. Mother said it was time Allie was getting some religion, anyhow. And she wanted a Sunday-school enrollment slip to show that doubting Principal lady.

Allie remembered that it had been rather fun, that Sunday-school. She guessed that was where she started the habit of going around to different Sunday-schools. It was interesting, and it was really wonderful the way they greeted newcomers at Sunday-school. They were always glad to have you, and they made you feel very important and wanted. And whenever you got tired or too used to one, you could move on to a new one.

In the five years since the Christian Science one, Allie guessed she must have tried them all, at one time or another. Once, she'd even joined the catechism class at Sacred Heart. The nice nun had said that, Allie might be a visitor as often as she liked. The nuns had treated her better than they had their own Catholic kids. She hadn't had to learn a thing.

Of course, there had been a few failures. Allie hadn't known that the Jewish synagogue on McAllister Street didn't allow little girls in the place. Or that the Seventh Day Adventists met on Saturday, and didn't drink coffee. Last time she'd skated out Golden Gate Avenue, she'd noticed a Holy Roller place in an empty store. Someday, perhaps, she'd try that one.

The fire-plug was getting uncomfortable. Allie squirmed and wished the 22 street-car would come along.

She looked down the hill towards the Waller-Arms apartments. It was shabbier than she'd remembered it, but maybe that was because the dusk made it seem gray and dingy. Allie couldn't remember moving away from there. But she and Mother had lived in Oakland and in Sacramento and had come back to San

Francisco since then. And somewhere in the process Father and Mother had gotten Separated.

And Grandma's house in Reedstown had burned to the ground, and she was in San Francisco, too. And Father had been ill. . . .

"Wuxtree, wuxtree, all about the glub gleebl glanny . . ."

Allie sat up straighter and got a good look at the headlines this time. "PRESIDENT WILSON'S CONDITION IMPROVES." Well, that was good. Mother said President Wilson was a wonderful man.

Allie heard a street-car rounding Duboce Street and stood up. Golly, it was crowded. Men were hanging on the steps and on the cowcatcher. She let it go by. She would let one more go by. Third one would be the charm.

When the clang of the third, the magic third street-car could be heard, she made preparation. She wriggled her way to the front of the crowd, a little ahead of two young ladies.

("My sister's got my transfer": she'd have to change her story.)

Yes, this *was* going to be the lucky time. With a practiced eye, Allie could see exactly how she was going to work it. The platform door opened and Allie waited for the two men in front of her to board the car. Perversely, though, they stepped aside.

"You first," they said gallantly to Allie. And ogled the two suddenly giggling young ladies.

"Oh, go *ahead*," Allie whispered furiously.

"Ladies *first*," they said loudly.

(Oh, dear. Being the very first on the car was *fatal* to riding free.)

"Step up, step up," the conductor ordered.

Allie looked up at him. Anyone could see he was a cross one. Well, she could *try*.

It didn't work. She hadn't expected it to. He stopped the whole waiting line of passengers while he watched, eagle-eyed, for Allie's fare.

"I guess—I guess I must have lost my nickel," she said.

"Stand back, stand back." The conductor was very business-like. "Let this little girl off."

The crowd muttered impatiently while Allie turned and fought her way off. She stood to one side, wondering whether the next car would be lucky. *This* was the third one; it should have been lucky. Lucky? She just remembered something. It was the one story Mother told about Allie. The only really exciting thing that had happened to her in her whole life. Once she, Allie, had been caught between two street-cars right there at Haight and Fillmore!

("One woman fainted, two women screamed," was the way Mother told it. "I didn't even know that Allie had broken away from me until I heard a woman shout, 'There's a little girl between those cars! Unless she stands *very* still . . .' I closed my eyes; I couldn't even breathe. I made up my mind right then and there that if anything had happened to Allie I was going to start walking towards the Beach. I was going to keep right on walking, too. Well, the street-cars passed each other. I opened my eyes and there was Allie, standing there as unconcerned as if nothing had happened! When I saw she wasn't hurt, I spanked her good for running away.")

Saved from Sudden Death at Haight and Fillmore, thought Allie. It was like a newspaper headline. Why, Haight and Fillmore must be her lucky streets! Suddenly she felt very brave and capable. She watched the last passengers pushing their way on, and she leaned against the rear fender of the street-car with as much carelessness as she could command.

The fender was cool and seemed firm. She'd never tried riding on the cowcatcher, but she'd seen men and boys do it. Allie hooked her feet into the slatted iron, put her elbows over the bar, and ducked her head beneath the platform window so the conductor couldn't see. Of course, humped over that way, it made her stick out behind, but—

With a jerk the car started, and Allie's heart turned over. She

could feel it turn. After the first fright, though, it was fun. And daring. Like flying in a flying machine. The fog was cool against her warm cheeks, and the wind caught her pleated serge skirt and made it fly out. She was glad she was wearing her black sateen bloomers.

The street-car made Page and Oak Streets without a stop, and oh, wonderful moment!—at Fell Street the nasty Perkins boy stood cowardly on the curb, and Allie could whoop at him and recklessly hold up one hand. “Look!” she shouted. “Look, Perk, one hand!”

She had just two seconds to enjoy Perk’s open-mouthed astonishment, then the conductor’s indignant face grimaced at her on the other side of the glass. He made violent and threatening motions. Allie laughed out loud and just wished she dared to thumb her nose at him. She did put her thumb to her forehead and wiggle her fingers at him. That meant almost as bad a thing as nose-thumbing.

The conductor pretended he was going to jerk the bell-rope, but Allie didn’t care any more. The next street was hers. With her new-found confidence, she didn’t even wait for the street-car to stop completely. She jumped off with little running steps, the way she’d seen the men do.

She was still laughing, although she didn’t know why, and she waved triumphantly at the conductor. She heard just the last of his shouted “. . . get your fool neck broken!”

Chapter Two

ALLIE trudged up her street, rested and content for the moment. But the worry of Mother and Aunt Lottie came back again. She *wished* she hadn't used the "I-fell-asleep-on-the-street-car-and-rode-to-the-end-of-the-line" excuse. She should have recognized that for a perfect one—held it for an emergency such as this.

She edged over to the curb and tried walking with one foot on the sidewalk, one foot in the gutter. Up, down, up, down.

"I'm crippled," she whimpered. "One leg is shorter than the other. It happened just yesterday—in a terrible accident." She lurched along feeling sorry for herself, hearing people say how sad it was, how very sad. But how *wonderful* her bravery, her courage. . . .

Then she thought of the cocoanut cake and stopped limping. Mother had been frosting the cake when Allie had left for school. Oh, was there anything in the world half so delicious as Mother's cocoanut cake?

Allie was suddenly, violently, hungry. Not stomach hunger—the kind that rumbled and thundered and made you blush—but the hunger that grabbed you right by the throat, made your mouth all wet and aching.

Oh, for something extra good—like bread, hot from the bakery. She'd take the warm heel of the bread, spread it with butter, then applesauce; and have cocoanut cake for dessert. She'd ask for the piece with the most frosting on it, and she'd eat it slowly, saving the wonderful frosting until the very last. . . .

A terrible thought made her walk faster. What if—what if she were not allowed any cocoanut cake? What if that were part of the punishment: NO COCOANUT CAKE FOR ALLIE? Mother wouldn't think of it, but Aunt Lottie might.

It was distinctly not a thing one prayed about, but one could certainly Hold a Thought: "Cocoanut cake, cocoanut cake," Allie intoned. "All is Infinite Mind and its Infinite Manifestation. God is Love. Keep Error and Aunt Lottie out."

Now that was hardly fair to Aunt Lottie. She was seldom mean. Just those times when she got her funny spells and wanted to be left alone. "My-graine," she called it. (Although Allie had heard Auntie Drue say that if she, Drue, were not a Christian, she could give "My-graine" a better name.)

And Aunt Lottie didn't like sweets and desserts, which was one good thing; and often Allie got to eat her share. Once, though, Allie had seen Aunt Lottie take a big drink of the lemon extract Mother kept in the pantry.

Carefully, now, Allie considered methods. The thing to do, if she could, was not to let on how important cocoanut cake was. The thing to do was to be contrite and tearful *before* eating was mentioned. Then, after all the scolding had been gotten through; after the punishment had been meted out; after all the promises had been made—"Yes, Mother. No, Mother. I'm sorry"—then she could safely speak of cake.

Allie's mouth filled with water. "I am starving," she whispered tragically. "I am starving. . . ." She clutched her throat and groped her way along, swaying violently from side to side.

Even in her weakened condition, Allie remembered the new rule about going in the back way. She clattered up the stairs into the kitchen. Aunt Lottie and Mother were washing the dishes, which meant that dinner was over, that the three boarders had finished. It must be *very* late—later, even, than she'd feared.

Neither Mother nor Lottie turned to look at her. Aunt Lottie kept right on talking, just as if Allie were not there. She was

talking about the boarders. She was always trying to "figure them out."

"I think Mr. Stimson is the deep one. He hardly says a word all through dinner, but I'll bet that if he once let himself go. . . . Now, Mr. Webster is a horse of a different color. Ha! Did you hear me, Lil? A horse. . . ." Aunt Lottie gave her sudden, loud laugh. "The poor guy even looks like a horse." Then her voice got teasing. "On the other hand, Lil, *your* Mr. Pegley. . . ."

Allie was afraid, for some reason. The kitchen light shone brightly over the sink and on the two women working there, but where Allie stood it was dark. It was frightening. Like being outside.

"Mother," Allie said timidly, "Mother. . . ."

Mother and Aunt Lottie had evidently made it up between them not to notice Allie. It was uncomfortable, but it wouldn't last long. Under ordinary circumstances Allie would have disregarded the ban—it irritated them terribly when she pretended not to notice their disapproval—but there was, after all, the cake to consider. . . .

There wasn't anything to do but wait for them. The kitchen was warm, and she was suddenly very tired. She sidled over to the chair by the stove and sat there, her feet tucked up on the rungs.

In a rush of love and remorse, Allie thought how pretty Mother looked under the light; her soft brown hair shining and curling against her neck, her cheeks flushed. . . . Aunt Lottie wasn't pretty, like Mother, but she was what The Crowd called "cute."

Mother's Crowd. There was Aunt Rose and Uncle Mart; Aunt Mabel and Uncle Neal—or sometimes Uncle Bob; Aunt Goldie and Uncle Maury—except last time it had been a Mr. Gregg.

Of course they weren't *real* aunts and uncles—like the aunt and uncle across the Bay—but they were Mother's best friends, and you had to be courteous.

When Rose and Mabel and Goldie came alone, Mother and Aunt Lottie said "The Girls." The Girls were all in Cloaks and Suits, and sometimes they called each other by their last names.

"Donovan," Aunt Rose would say, "tell Lil and Lottie about the Allied buyer."

Aunt Goldie would giggle and tell the story, then threaten Aunt Rose: "Tucker, if you let on down at the store that I told . . ."

It was funny how the uncles kept changing, although the aunts were always the same. They had wonderful times, the Crowd, and there were always new men coming or going. It got confusing at times. But you didn't have to call the men Uncle until they'd been in the Crowd a long time.

The Crowd thought Aunt Lottie was the best sport they knew. They were proud of Lottie. Because Lottie's husband had wanted a divorce to marry some floozie and Lottie had given it to him—just like that. No hard words, no fussing; and she refused to accept one single cent of something called "alimony," either.

"It would be like being *kept*," Aunt Lottie had said, looking very hard at Aunt Rose. "And as long as I can stand on my own two good legs . . ."

The thing was, Aunt Lottie's legs weren't too good. Allie had seen them, the times she had to help lace up her corsets. They were all seamed and ridged with great blue veins.

"My varicose," Aunt Lottie called them. They were the reason she'd gotten out of Cloaks and Suits. Now she worked at Wardell-Rowans', the big, fancy grocery store downtown. She got to sit down at her work all day, she got Saturday afternoon off, she could buy groceries in wholesale lots, and she got a big discount on wilting vegetables or spoiling fruit. She also got to bring home all the cans whose labels had fallen off. Aunt Goldie said she bet Lottie wasn't above loosening a few of the labels free with a hairpin when no one was looking.

That couldn't be true, though. Because whenever they opened

up one of the unlabeled cans, Lottie could never guess what was in it.

"Cherries?" she'd hazard, tilting the can.

Then Mother would shake the can. "Too large for cherries. It doesn't rattle."

Allie would get to guess, too. "It thumps. Peaches? Pineapple?"

The can would be opened and it would turn out to be solid pack tomatoes.

Aunt Lottie was Mother's best friend. She wasn't a real aunt, either, but she had been one of the young marrieds in Reedstown, years ago, with Mother. She remembered all the things Mother remembered. And she was on Mother's side. Not on Father's.

It was Aunt Lottie who had talked Mother into trying a boarding-house. She and Lil each had five rooms of furniture in storage, didn't they? And there was this big house with dirt-cheap rent, in a good location, not too far from downtown. And had Lil stopped to think what they could save on food with Lottie's discount?

No one could cook like Lil; no one could manage on next-to-nothing like Lil. ("Goodness knows, Lottie, I've had plenty of practice in *that* direction.") Well, then, look. They'd have Lottie's pay-check coming in every week; Lil could work extra at the Bon Ton on Saturdays, because Lottie would be home that day. And Allie would be a help. She was a big girl now. She could make the beds in the morning before school; she could wait on the table, run to the store for them. . . . And oh, Gawd, Lil, they wouldn't have to depend on some man; they would be independent. It would be like owning a business.

Then too, Mother pointed out, it would mean that she could keep Allie with her. She wouldn't have to put Allie in some woman's care, and then worry all the time she was at work, wondering if the child was all right.

It was, however, the unexpected gift of Mr. Stimson, Mr.

Webster, and Mr. Pegley that had really decided them. It was, Lottie insisted, a sign. Even Mother was impressed. And talk about coincidence!

There was Lottie on the Powell Street cable (and why she took it that day she never knew; she was going only four blocks, but her feet hurt) and she'd sat right down next to a Mrs. Williams, who used to be a customer of hers. Hadn't seen Mrs. Williams in donkey's years; wouldn't have recognized her if Mrs. W. hadn't spoken first. And in the course of their conversation it came out that Mrs. Williams was just so anxious to move to Seattle to live with her daughter; but she had these three nice, steady gentlemen—they'd been with her for so long, called her place home—and she simply couldn't bear breaking up, on their account.

Well, Mrs. Williams had *given* Mother and Aunt Lottie Mr. Stimson, Mr. Webster, and Mr. Pegley with full directions about their likes and dislikes. Generously, too, she gave them many hints about boarding-house management. Like splitting worn sheets down the middle and turning them; about putting small globes in hallways to save on electricity; about buying unbleached muslin in the bolt and bleaching it yourself—it soon got white, and it wore like iron. She instructed them about saving all the blankets that got thin, putting two or three together and covering them with cheap sateen. When bound, they were not only colorful quilts, but would serve as bedspreads, too.

"Go for a strictly white-collar clientele," she'd said. "The ones who get paid semi-monthly."

And Mrs. Williams had sold them her heavy white dishes—service for twelve—and her extra towels. Mother and Aunt Lottie had been very grateful. They gave Mrs. Williams a box of Maskey's glacé fruits to eat on the train.

So far they were breaking even in their venture. Aunt Lottie said if they could just get some more boarders (NOT women;

women were always wanting extra kitchen privileges, gas plates or men in their rooms, or a little soap to wash out something), why, she and Lil would have a *gold mine*.

Now Allie watched Aunt Lottie wring out the dishrag, hang it over the faucet. Then Aunt Lottie turned and pretended to be very startled at the sight of Allie.

"Well, look who's here. Big as life and twice as natural—the kid herself."

(Aunt Lottie was just a little bit vulgar. Sometimes she swore. Mother didn't—ever. Mother said it wasn't refined.)

Aunt Lottie didn't sound sore; she sounded cheerful. And Allie brightened. Maybe—

"Now don't tell us," Lottie said good-naturedly, "that you fell asleep on the street-car and rode to the end of the line. Please don't give us that."

Allie was shocked. Aunt Lottie hadn't believed that one? But she'd *acted* as if she had. This was distinctly unfair. . . .

"And just where have you been, Alice Barton?"

That was Mother. And using the full name that way—that meant she was extra cross.

Allie started her explanation, but lamely. Aunt Lottie's disbelief of her very best excuse had taken away her confidence.

Mother didn't listen.

"Since half-past three, Alice Barton, I've been watching that clock—worried sick. You know you are supposed to come directly home from school."

Yes, Allie knew that.

"And you know how your poor mother worries, too," Aunt Lottie put in.

"I wish *I* were a thoughtless little girl," Mother said, "who didn't have to worry about anything. Just let my poor mother do the worrying. Not only about rent, and food, and clothes.

Make her worry, too, about her child getting kidnapped, or hit by a car. . . .”

“But, Mother—”

“Just let her mother have to go to the grocery store,” Mother continued, “have to leave off cooking dinner—dinner that three gentlemen have already paid for—and run the chance of it getting ruined while she trots out for bread.”

“You weren’t here to wait on the table or help with the dishes,” Aunt Lottie joined in, “and this morning you forgot to make poor Mr. Pegley’s bed.”

Allie scowled. That Mr. Pegley—

“Why do you think I’m working like this, Allie?” Mother wanted to know. “For myself? No. It’s for you. To make a decent home for the two of us. I work like a Chinaman. . . .”

Allie cringed in her chair. This was going to be worse than the usual what-for. After “Chinaman,” Mother usually cried. And Father’s name would be mentioned soon. And then, in spite of biting her teeth down hard, in spite of pinching her leg, Allie, too, would cry.

“You’re heedless,” Mother said. “Heedless and irresponsible, just like your father. Head in the clouds, let someone else keep their feet on the ground. Let someone else do the worrying and the contriving. Let someone else count the nickels and the pennies and figure out where the next meal is coming from. . . .”

Allie knew it was the wrong thing to say, but, “Father would too send you money if he could. But he’s sick. He gets just enough from Grandma to live on himself. He told me so—last time. . . .”

Mother tightened her lips. She wasn’t going to cry after all. “Listen, Allie, I don’t expect money from Harry. I’m not heartless. I know he’s ill. I can get by, and take you with me. But you’re always worrying me without cause. Why can’t you be like other little girls, content to stay around the house, willing and

anxious to help your mother? Why can't you be quiet and good and refined?"

Allie twisted desperately. *She* didn't know why she wasn't like other little girls, or why she did the things she did, or why they always turned out to be wrong.

Aunt Lottie stirred something on the stove, and Allie tried to change the course of the conversation. "I'm hungry. I'm awful hungry."

"You don't even *listen* to me!" Mother was exasperated. "Everything I say to you goes in one ear and out the other. You make me lose all patience with you! And you can just stay hungry."

If Allie had stopped to think, she'd have known that Mother didn't mean it. Mother was always threatening things like that, never carrying them out. But, "no cocoanut cake?" Allie wailed, before she could stop herself.

"No cocoanut cake," Mother said. "Maybe that will help you remember."

Allie started to cry. And it seemed an awful thing to be crying about cocoanut cake instead of about Father.

Mother's voice got quieter. "You can fix yourself some jelly bread and milk," she said.

"But will you save my cocoanut cake for me? Until tomorrow?"

"I said, *no* cocoanut cake. Allie, you have to be punished, you have to learn some way. Besides, tomorrow is my day at the Bon Ton. I won't have to get up early to bake because there are exactly three pieces of the cake left. They will do for dessert tomorrow night for Mr. Stimson, Mr. Webster, and Mr. Pegley."

Allie wished sudden and violent harm to Mr. Stimson, Mr. Webster, and Mr. Pegley. The milk Mother poured out for her was warm, insipid. The bread wasn't good, either. It was grocery store bread, and dry. And the jelly was jam that had, surprisingly

enough, come in an unlabeled can. And the jam was full of thick, pithy seeds that kept getting into her sore tooth.

"When you finish there, Allie, you're to go directly to bed. We put your cot in the little hall-room for tonight. We've got an ad in the paper to rent that back room over the week-end."

Why, the hall-room was practically a closet! And it was the third time she'd been moved. "But, *Moth-er*, you told me the back room was to be mine; that I could put magazine pictures up, and have the bureau for my very own. You said that maybe sometime, when I got a best friend, she could spend the night with me, and we could have cocoa in a thermos!"

"Allie, you'll never learn earlier that we can't always do what we'd want. Of course I'd like you to have a room of your own. Your poor Aunt Lottie and I might like a room apiece, too, instead of doubling up. We can rent that big room to two gentlemen, get more money coming in, get a little bit ahead. Just begin to realize, Allie, that everything we've got is tied up in this house, and we've got to make a go of it. I've got you to clothe and feed and educate for years to come."

Mother's lips got thin, and Allie thought how that made her not pretty any more. ". . . gets more like her father every day," Mother murmured to Lottie.

Aunt Lottie nodded sympathetically, then gave a sudden shriek.

"Today's Friday, the seventeenth! Lil, you've forgotten!"

"Forgotten what?"

"Oh, Gawd, this is the night Harry comes for Allie. October seventeenth. Don't you remember? He gets her for this week-end—until Saturday night."

Mother got all flushed up. "Lottie, you might have reminded me. Allie, put that milk down and go and get cleaned up. Here, let me look at that middy blouse. Filthy! I might have known. . . ."

"I wore it all week to school. . . ."

"If just once you'd manage to take care of your things, Allie. Be dainty, like other little girls. . . ."

Allie looked down at her middy blouse. "That black spot," she offered, "was where I caught the baseball and made our side win."

"There's not enough hot water for a bath," Mother said, "and we haven't time to light the heater. You get over to the sink, put the basin in, take whatever hot water there is in the teakettle, and you scrub *good*."

Mother rushed around. "I'd planned this so differently. Harry is such a crank. I meant to wash her hair, too. And I've had no time to . . ." She raised her voice and addressed Allie. "You see what your naughtiness does? Why didn't you get home this afternoon when you were supposed to? You'd have been all clean and ready by now. You know how critical your father is. . . ."

"But I didn't know this was week-end-with-Father." Allie wiped the soap off her face, twisted the washrag corner into her ears. "Even you and Aunt Lottie just this minute remembered—"

"Argue, argue," Mother scolded. "You argue everything. . . ."

Aunt Lottie was looking at Allie's underwear. "Gawd, Lil, she's got to have clean underwear. Where is it, kid? Clean panties and waist?"

"I don't know. I think I had some somewhere. . . ."

"What did we do with the kid's stuff, Lil? Did we pack that in the cardboard carton?"

Mother got even more distracted. "I can't remember, Lottie. I know I've got to iron her a fresh middy blouse—and it hasn't been dampened. . . . Look, just try to find a waist. Those black bloomers don't show the dirt. Then comb her hair and braid it straight. Harry will find fault, anyhow. Anything to get back at me. . . ."

"My good shoes are still at the cobbler's." Allie dabbed gently at her neck. This was exciting! Almost like a nickelodeon, see-

ing characters come suddenly to life and start dashing around. "Bump-de-de-bump, de-de-bump, bump, bump. . . ." She started to sing the hurry music the nickelodeon piano played whenever the Cavalry came to the rescue. "Bump-de-de-bump. . . ."

"Oh, stop it!" Mother cried. "Allie, sometimes you don't even show good sense. Singing at a time like this. Where's your black and white check coat?"

"Coat? Coat?" Allie stalled. She knew exactly where it was. It was in a crumpled heap in the back of the closet under the stairs. She'd meant to hang it up, after she'd mended it. It had an awful big tear in it ("There was this *vicious* brown dog attacking a *dear* little boy"; she tried the lie out silently, tentatively. . . .)

There was an "Oh, Gawd" from the front hall. Undoubtedly, Aunt Lottie had found the coat. Mother looked up from her ironing as Lottie held the mutilated coat out for her inspection. She sighed. "Climbing fences, I expect."

"Or skating. Someday, Allie," Aunt Lottie continued, "I wish you'd tell me how you manage it. Everything you wear gets torn or snagged in the most unlikely places. . . ."

"Never mind that now, Lottie. She'll just have to wear her school coat. What about stockings? Has she any long white ones?"

"Just one, Lil. The other one got in with the colored clothes in the wash. It is now a bright pink. That Japanese wrapper of mine, I guess. . . ."

"And all my black stockings have holes in them," Allie said.

"What about the ones she has on, Lil?"

"They've got holes, too," Allie answered. "Big ones."

"How long has she worn them?"

"All week, I think. But maybe they'll do. With those high shoes, the holes don't show. Allie, do your stockings smell?"

"I don't know," Allie said. "I haven't had them off all week."

"Oh, don't be silly." Now Aunt Lottie looked mad.

"It *isn't* silly. I figured it out on paper. It takes me seven minutes to lace up these old high shoes—ten if a shoelace breaks. So I just sleep with them on, and that way I get to stay in bed ten minutes longer. . . ."

Mother thumped the iron down. "I give up. I give up!"

Allie sighed and gave up, too. It was hard for grown-ups to be reasonable. Silly old high shoes, anyhow. But Mother made her wear them because she said they would make her ankles slim and pretty by the time she grew up.

"Well, they'll just have to do, I guess. Allie, when you take your stockings off tonight—and listen, you TAKE THEM OFF—put them in the toes of your shoes, so your father doesn't see. Next week, I'll get down to the Emporium and get you some things. . . ."

Now everything accelerated and the hurry music got louder. Aunt Lottie braided her hair while Allie put the polish on her shoes. Allie had lost the rubber bands that kept her braids from unwinding, and Aunt Lottie couldn't find any in the kitchen drawer, so she pulled some long hair strands out of her own head and used them to tie up the braids. Allie tossed one braid forward to examine it. It looked good—that pretty red color against the light brown. When she grew up, she was going to use Egyptian henna, too.

The middy blouse, as it slipped over her head, was warm and damp and made her shiver. While Mother polished away at the shoes, putting extra polish on the cracked places, Aunt Lottie pulled the serge coat over Allie's shoulders. There was a big spot on the lapel, and Aunt Lottie scolded while she washed it with the dishrag. The spot was from that last strawberry ice-cream cone, but Allie didn't think it would help to mention it.

Mother and Aunt Lottie inspected her. "A dab of my Indian Hay?" Aunt Lottie suggested.

Mother shook her head. "*He* thinks heavy scent is vulgar."

Then the doorbell rang three times, and footsteps could be heard going down the front stairs.

"Your father will meet you at the corner under the street light," Mother said, "as usual."

"Isn't he carrying it a bit far?" Lottie wanted to know. "It wouldn't hurt him to come into the house and say good evening to us, decently."

"That's Harry for you," Mother said. "Stubborn as the day is long. He said he didn't want to see me again, ever." She didn't look sad, Allie thought. More as if something amused her quietly; more as if she were proud. . . .

Aunt Lottie was nodding knowingly. "Can't trust himself. One look at you. . . ."

Mother blushed and shook her head at Lottie, but the half-smile was still there.

"Now, Allie, be a good girl. Show your father that I'm raising you properly—as properly as I can, working like an old Chinaman. . . . And, Allie—" Mother's voice wavered, got embarrassed.

"I know," Allie said quickly, "I'm not to talk about things here. . . ."

"Just say, 'Ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies.'" Aunt Lottie instructed.

(Imagine saying a thing like that to Father! And Aunt Lottie and Mother never seemed to realize that they asked just as many questions about Father as Father did about them. And it was so hard to dodge the questions. It was like being in the middle of something, pulled this way, then that way. It was like being two people, with two different names—Allie and Alice—and never being able to remember which person you were.)

"Mum's the word," Aunt Lottie went on. "And above everything else, don't mention the electric meter gadget, kid. We'd all go to jail. . . ."

"Oh, I *never* do," Allie protested.

Hurriedly, now, Allie said her good-byes, buttoned her coat. She jumped down the front stairs, two steps at a time.

Excitement lumped up, made her heart go fast. Going to stay with Father. And *this* time everything would go well and easy. She *wouldn't* ask silly questions; she'd remember to be lady-like; she would do everything *right* for once. . . .

Not like last time. No wonder Father got mad at her. It hadn't been her fault, exactly, but she couldn't explain properly. . . .

She'd found some letters in the old trunk in the basement, while she'd been looking for dress-up clothes. They were wonderful letters, and Allie had shown them to Mother.

"They're from your father," Mother had smiled as she read them, "written a good many years ago, in Reedstown."

"I'll bet Father would like to see them again."

"Would he?" Mother's smile had turned into a giggle. "Here"—she'd held out one—"show this one to him. Ask him why he doesn't write letters like that any more. Of course, Allie, don't tell him *I* said that. Just pretend you found them. . . ."

It was poetry. Her father wrote poetry? How wonderful! And it was written in such beautiful, fancy handwriting:

*If every year held a thousand days,
And a thousand nights,
To you I'd dedicate them, every one,
And count them all too few
To measure the debt I owe you
And your treasured love divine.
I can never repay, I can only say,
That I love you, Wife of Mine.*

Obediently, Allie had delivered the letter, asked the question. Father had been stern and angry. He'd crumpled the faded letter in his hand and shouted at her. "Where did you get this?"

"In an old trunk in the basement."

"How dared you? Were there more?"

"Yes, Father."

"Where are they now?"

"I don't know."

"Alice, you are to destroy them, directly you get home. Do you hear me?"

"Yes. Yes, Father."

"I'll not be made a laughing stock of . . . I'll wager they're all read aloud. *No* sense of decency, of the fitness of things. . . ." Father had stayed angry for a long time. "And furthermore, Alice, I don't want them mentioned—ever again."

"Yes, Father."

But Father himself had mentioned the poetry, at the very last, when he'd put her on the street-car that would take her home. "Alice, that poetry . . . I was very young. It isn't even good poetry, you know."

"Oh, Father, I thought it was beautiful. . . ."

As soon as she'd gotten home, she'd started the search for the letters. She'd found them in Mother's square vanity case, and she'd burned them as Father had instructed. Then Mother had been the angry one. "They were mine," she'd cried. "You had no right to destroy my letters." And Mother had stayed cross with Allie for days and days.

Allie ran down the hill, now, and the tall figure under the street lamp turned and came to meet her. He leaned down and his lips brushed against her cheek, and his beard tickled. Father hadn't used to wear a beard—just a mustache. The beard was to hide the bad place on his cheek. A barber had shaved off a mole there; and it had started up something that Father had to have treated with X-rays.

Funny how she could not remember Father easily when she

was away from him. All she could think of then was a very tall, bearded man with blue eyes, and a deep, deep voice.

Now, under the street lamp, she could see the handsomeness of him; the long, black eyelashes; the forehead Allie secretly called "noble"; and the crisp wave in the dark hair. Father was so wonderfully polite. He always took off his derby hat when he kissed her.

"Hello, Father. It's been—it seems so long."

"Two months, Alice. You've grown, haven't you?"

"Have I?" As they walked down Grove Street she took his arm, timidly. Sometimes it was all right to take a gentleman's arm—or was it the other way around and just over curbs? She guessed it was all right. Father didn't say anything, and he squeezed his arm against her fingers the tiniest bit. Father's arm was thin, thinner than she remembered.

"Are you still at the same hotel, Father? And how are the friends you took me to meet? Their name was Grantley."

"You have a fine memory, Alice. I'm glad to see that."

Oh, everything was going to be all right. Father wasn't mad at her any more. She would make his compliment about her memory come true, too. She would memorize and memorize . . . and not only stuff she liked, either. She would amaze her teachers. . . .

"I have a little apartment of my own, now, Alice. Housekeeping rooms, really, but very comfortable."

"Are we going there now?"

"Yes. And just wait until you see what I've got planned for us. We're going to keep regular house. Bet you don't know what a fine cook your father can be. . . ."

"Oh, yes. I remember . . ." Allie stopped. That was always bad . . . remembering. "I'm glad," she finished. "I'm—just glad."

They walked over to the street-car. Gallantly, Father helped her on. Allie made a face at the conductor as she passed him.

The man looked startled, but Allie wasn't sorry. She'd never seen this conductor before, but he was a potential enemy.

"Where is your little apartment, Father?"

"You'll see. And, Alice"—Father's voice got solemn—"I'm going to ask something of you. You may not understand, because you are just a little girl, but—well, to obviate any questions, or your having to lie, suppose you just forget to notice where my apartment is? Don't look at the address, or the street sign."

"Sure, Father. Sure." Uncomfortably, Allie looked out the window.

"And how is everything"—Father didn't say "home"; he just jerked his head—"back there?"

"All right."

"They still have the same three men? What were their names?"

"Mr. Stimson-Mr. Webster-Mr. Pegley," Allie said, very fast.

"That's right, I'd forgotten. Pegley's the widower, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"He's the one they favor, isn't he? The one that gets—extra privileges?"

"Well—he does pay more than the other two, Father. He rents the big front room. He's what they call a single. You know."

"No, I don't know. I know nothing about the intricacies of boarding-house management."

"Well, he pays extra for things he wants. He has a glass of hot water and lemon juice every morning. And he likes steel-cut oatmeal for breakfast. And brown bread at every meal and bran muffins at night. For roughage. So naturally, you see, he—well, he pays extra." Nervously, Allie tried to think of something to turn the conversation. "Auntie Drue . . . have you seen Auntie Drue lately? We haven't. . . ."

"Drue?" Father said. "Oh, yes. Yes, I've seen her. Why in the world do you call her *Auntie* Drue? It sounds so childish. . . ."

Allie knew it did. But with all the people she had to call

aunts, it was the only way she could show that Drue was someone special, someone to love. Next to Father and Mother (and Grandmother, too, of course) Allie loved Drue. *She* had been a Reedstown girl, those years ago, before she'd come down to San Francisco, and she remembered things about when Father-was-a-boy, and once in a while you could get her to talk about them. Auntie Drue was friendly with both Father and Mother. She refused to take sides. She said life was much too short. Auntie Drue—

Father was talking again, but he was no longer on the subject of Mr. Pegley. "That cloak and suit crowd . . . do they still infest the house?"

Allie nodded.

"A common, vulgar lot. How a woman like your mother can stand such riff-raff. . . . Of course, Lottie, now—" Father said.

"Galahad," Allie broke in. "You were like Galahad or Lancelot tonight, Father. Riding to my rescue."

"Whatever in the world are you talking about?" Father was impatient, but interested enough to stop talking about the boarding-house.

"I mean—well, if you hadn't come, I'd have had to be punished. You see, I was very naughty today." Allie plunged into the story of her misdeeds, making herself out practically a criminal.

"And no cocoanut cake, eh, Alice?"

That wasn't exactly what she'd expected him to say, but she echoed, "No cocoanut cake."

"Ring the bell, Alice, here's where we get off."

They stood on the platform, Father swinging easily on the steps, waiting to help her off. Allie didn't look at the street sign, but she couldn't help knowing exactly where they were. She'd skated this far up Fillmore many a time. They were at California Street; the cable clanged by and confirmed it. But she

wouldn't, she *wouldn't* look at the address when they got to Father's apartment.

"Is this the way to your apartment, Father?"

"Around the next corner. But I have a little errand to do. . . ."
Father's voice was without expression. "Yes, I thought there was one down here. It's still open."

They turned into a brilliantly lighted bakery. "I want to buy a cake," Father said to the lady in the white apron, "the biggest cocoanut cake you've got."

Chapter Three

FATHER's apartment was small, but it was a corner one. A brass double bed took up most of the room, and an army cot was made up in the corner. Books, newspapers, and booklets were piled high on the square table, and a green Morris chair filled the space by the window. The kitchenette, small and compact, had space enough for a table and two chairs, a three-ring gas plate, a miniature ice-box and sink.

Father lit all the lights and pulled down the green shades. He showed her where to hang her hat and coat, where to wash her hands.

"I scrubbed them good, Father, just before I left."

"But you are going to eat. You must always wash your hands before you eat."

"I must?"

"Everyone knows that, Alice."

Allie didn't. The *things* that everyone knew, that she hadn't even heard of.

Father was in the kitchen when she came out. He was untying the string around the cake box. He cut a wedge of cake, the biggest wedge Allie had ever had proffered to her.

"Milk? Shall I make cocoa?"

"Oh, no, Father, this is plenty." Allie looked at the cake and wished she was hungry. She was almost always hungry, why couldn't she be now? She took a bite—remembering to make it a *small* bite—and could have cried. The cake was dry, tasteless,

and bakery-ish. It felt dusty against her teeth. Even the cocoanut part was hard and stale, not moist and long and squiggly. "Aren't—aren't you going to have some cake, too?"

Father lit his pipe and smiled at her. "No, I'll watch you enjoy it. Cake and I have parted company for the time being." He touched his chest. "Heartburn. Have to be very careful what I eat. Is the cake good?"

"Yes, thank you." Allie didn't know how she was going to manage to eat it all. And she had to keep remembering to chew on the right side, because of her tooth. . . . "Could I have a glass of water, please?"

The cake was better, with water to wash it down. There was a queer feeling in back of her eyes, and she knew, sadly, that she would never be able to like cocoanut cake again. Just as she knew she would never forget the numbers 987 on the brass plate downstairs, or the printed card, APT. 3-B, that was on Father's door.

"More cake, Alice?"

"T'd—I'd better not. I might"—she laughed nervously—"I might get heartburn."

Father showed her the cooler, hidden outside the little window over the sink, and the square tin oven that fitted right over one of the gas rings.

"I'm going to make biscuits for us tomorrow night. To go with—but no, that's a surprise until we go shopping. What is your favorite breakfast, Alice?"

Allie considered. And looked at her father appraisingly. Would it do any good to tell? Grown-ups were always asking what you liked, then telling you what was wrong with your choice. Well, she'd chance it. Since it was the most wonderful breakfast in the world. . . .

"Coffee," she said happily. "Coffee with real cream in it—the thick kind of cream. Then crusty, sour French bread—warm, if you can get it that way—and then lots and lots of butter."

Father laughed, but kindly. "All right. I'll get the French bread in the morning, before you're awake."

"Oh, I hate to think of going to sleep. . . ."

"But it must be long past your bedtime, child."

Allie didn't say that there was no such thing as a proper bedtime for her. Mother and Aunt Lottie weren't a bit fussy about when she went to bed. "It's not a school night, Father."

"What do you want to do? Take a walk along Fillmore Street?"

"No—I've done a lot of walking already today. Could we maybe sit together in the Morris chair? Look out the window at the people passing by?"

"Suits me."

"And turn out all the lights but the kitchenette one, Father. It will make it cozy."

They sat together, Allie leaning forward, her elbows on the low windowsill. "Father, look! Down near the corner. See? That man—he's stumbling. There, he almost fell right down!"

Father called her attention to something else, then said: "This neighborhood is not exactly Nob Hill."

When Allie got cold, Father shut the window, and put his arm around her. She leaned back against him, companionably.

"Father . . . Father, what is it like up in Reedstown?"

"Now, Alice? Just—snow."

"Is it truly a ghost town?"

"So they tell me. I heard that the post office is still standing; and the Odd Fellows' hall. . . ."

"Your very own father built that, didn't he? Before you were born?"

"Yes."

"I wonder why it didn't burn, when the rest of the town did."

"It was quite a ways out from the town."

"Why did the town have to burn?"

"No water. But the fire didn't make Reedstown a ghost town,

Alice. There weren't many people left. They had moved away, after the mines closed down."

"But Grandma's house was there. It burned."

"Yes."

"Your house—Grandma's house—was it the biggest house in town?"

"No. But the oldest. Once, Reedstown had four regular mansions, Alice. As fine as anything you could see in the city. They were all built after the big strike on Hungry Hill."

"You've never gone back, have you, Father?"

"No."

"Haven't you—haven't you wanted to?"

"No." Father's voice was low.

"And it was a gay town, a proud town," Allie said, trying to remember the few things she had heard about Reedstown. "Twice a day, the stage from Oroville would come pounding down the hill, and it would pull up with a flourish, and the driver would stand up and wave his whip. . . ."

Father puffed at his pipe. "Strange," he said, "strange. In a way, it doesn't seem reasonable or right. That a man's town can be—can thrive, and grow, and hold out every promise—and then suddenly be destroyed. All in his lifetime."

Allie sat very quietly.

"It's there, solid, as solid as the mountains." It was almost as if Father were talking to himself. "And it's tied up with everything you know, everything you've done. You know every part of it and you don't want anything different. Then, overnight, it's done. It's finished. It's—gone."

"Tell," Allie ventured softly, "tell about earlier, Father. When Grandma's father came out from Wisconsin and established the first trading post with the Indians."

"John Reed. That was before the gold rush. And he built a swinging bridge across the Feather River, by hand . . ."

"And on his next trip down, he brought his youngest daughter, who was Grandma."

"She was seventeen."

"And then she met your father . . ."

"Your grandfather, Alice."

"I don't remember—"

"No. He died before you were born; before we left Reedstown. He was much older than Grandma, you know—twenty years or so."

"And he was big and strong and fierce. He was—" Allie stopped. She must not say what she had heard.

But Father could not have been paying attention, because he was talking quietly of the way the town had looked. How the tall mountains had hemmed the town in, how clear and sparkling was the air that swept the town, how the deer came down to visit, what the mountain lions sounded like as they screamed at night. And what it was like above timber line. . . . Then he spoke of the taste of the Cornish pasties and of the saffron cake that the miners' wives used to make and send to him.

The shabby city apartment receded, the clamor of people and cars faded, while Allie warmed and quickened to the story of the town. She tried so hard to see it in her mind. . . .

"Your house—when you went in—was the front room to your right or left?"

"Why"—Father sounded surprised—"to the left."

Allie sighed happily. Yes. That was the way she'd seen it. It was always so much easier to make up stories, once you knew exactly where rooms actually were in a house. "And going to school, Father, did you go up the hill, or down?"

"Up, of course. The town was downhill."

"And which way was your father's mine?"

"West."

That didn't help Allie much. She hadn't learned west and east yet. But she was grateful to know this much. She waited,

but Father didn't go on talking about the town. Oh, she wished he would. It was like a story happening to people in a story book. . . .

"Father."

"What?"

"I've just thought. Things that happen to people. They're like stories, aren't they?"

"Sometimes."

"I think that's wonderful. If people would tell—if you could listen, there'd be hundreds and hundreds of stories—already made up."

"You sound sleepy, Alice." Father stood up.

Allie stretched. "I am." She blinked as Father put on the light.

"Your downy couch, Mademoiselle," he pointed to the big bed.

"Where will you sleep?"

"I had the landlady make up the cot."

"Oh, I'll sleep there. I can sleep anywhere. I'm used to—"

"You are an honored guest. You sleep where your host puts you." Father bowed gallantly. Allie huddled her shoulders with happiness. She felt so—so *cherished*.

"Inasmuch, Mademoiselle, as your maid evidently neglected to pack your valise with, ah, accouterments" (Allie giggled. She *loved* Father when he was like this), "I shall see what my wardrobe provides in the way of—ah!" He held up a long nightshirt. "Fresh from the laundered hands of a certain Mr. Sing Foo. Regard you. You may think it looks like flannelette, but it's really a new and fine type of nainsook. You will please notice the ruffled sleeves"—Father pinned the dangling sleeves with safety pins—"and the fine French pleats about the neck. . . ." He put more safety pins in, then held the garment up for her laughter.

"All right. And the bathroom shall serve as your boudoir. You undress in there."

Allie undressed quickly. Oh, this was fun. Don't let anything

happen to spoil it. Don't make her say the wrong thing, ask wrong questions, or do something common. . . .

The nightshirt trailed the ground. "Ready or not, Father, here I come. . . ."

"I'll tuck you in," Father said, "and sit with you until you fall asleep. Then I'm going down to the corner for a minute. I have to see a party . . ."

He stopped to laugh at her efforts to keep from tripping. She crawled into the high bed, waited for Father to pull the covers up to her neck. His face was suddenly angry, and his black eyebrows came together over his nose.

"What's wrong, Father? What did I do?"

Allie looked where Father was looking. Her feet! They were practically black. Blue-black, really. They looked as if she were still wearing her shoes. The marks of the laces were there; you could see where the tops of the shoes had ended. Allie thought that was interesting.

But Father was mad. "Go into the bathroom and wash your feet."

Allie obeyed, sadly. "I'm clean everywhere else," she yelled out to reassure him. But he didn't answer. It was too bad. And they had been getting along so well, she and Father. Things like this were always happening to her. . . .

She climbed back into bed after Father had inspected her feet.

"Don't you want to unbraid your hair, and brush it?" Father wanted to know.

"I'd only have to braid it up again."

"But don't—I thought little girls brushed their hair every night."

"I don't think so, Father. Unless they're going to put it up in rags or make curls or something."

Father sat in the Morris chair and they played the goodnight game.

"good night."

“Good NIGHT.”

Each one tried to say it with a different emphasis. Father won because he thought of “good” said deep down in his throat, then “Night” with the tiniest, funniest squeak.

From somewhere outside, loud voices started. There was a yell, a curse, then the crashing of glass. Allie bounded out of bed and over to the window to put up the shade.

“Father! It’s right across the street—see? On the second floor where the lights are. That man—he’s pulling off all the window shades. I think it’s the very same man who fell down in the street before. Oh, look, there’s the window he broke! And that lady is trying to pull him back. And Father, will you look at that? Why, he’s stark—”

Father pulled the shade down in such a hurry it snapped protestingly. But it blocked out the exciting scene.

“Alice, get back into bed. I’m sorry you had to see. . . . This is a low, cheap neighborhood.”

“But please let’s watch, Father. Maybe they’ll send a policeman, maybe even the patrol wagon. Maybe he’ll kill that lady!”

“Alice!” Father’s voice was stern. “Alice, that man—had—no—clothes—on! Now get into bed.”

Allie snuggled down. “Good night for the last time,” she said meekly, and Father stooped over and gave her shoulder a pat.

Just the same, she thought rebelliously, just the same—and she was undoubtedly a low and common little girl—but she would like to have seen that man more clearly. She had never seen a naked man. Not even a naked little boy.

Chapter Four

WHEN Allie awoke, the apartment was light. The street noises outside had a steady sound, as if they'd been going about their business for some time.

There was no groping for reality, no wondering where she was. She knew immediately. She was with Father. And she was happy.

She could hear Father moving about in the kitchenette. The door was closed, but that must be where that delicious, wonderful smell of percolating coffee was coming from. Had he gone out already for the French bread and the cream? (Pastry, she hoped; not thin table cream.) She looked over at the cot; it was made up. Father was *so* neat and tidy.

Allie snuggled back into the covers, stretched luxuriously. She wiggled her toes in unaccustomed freedom. They felt good. She yawned and stretched again, then closed her eyes. And wondered how she looked with her eyes closed.

Now, there was a thing you probably never knew your whole life long: what you looked like with your eyes closed. You couldn't see by a mirror. There was simply no way—unless, of course, somebody took a picture of you after you were dead. And a lot of good that would do you.

She should get up. She should get up very quietly and make this bed. And make it right, too. No careless throwing back of the covers—the way she made old Pegley's bed. No. She'd take

all these covers off, and pull the sheets as tightly as she could; make the corners exactly even.

It would be nice to be naturally neat and tidy, like Father. The way it would be nice to be . . . what was it Auntie Drue had said Father was—dexterous? It was a joy to watch Father fix something. His long, slender fingers, knowing so exactly what they were doing. . . .

Dexterous. Allie brought her hands out from underneath the covers and examined them. No matter how far away she held them, no matter how she turned them, they refused to look long or slender. Even if her nails would grow *this* long—her hands would still look short and square.

Aunt Lottie said Allie was about the clumsiest, awkwardest child she had ever seen. And Mother wouldn't let Allie touch the hand-painted cups and saucers—not even to clear them off the table. Well, she got out of a lot of dishwashing that way.

Really, she *should* get up. But this was a terribly comfortable bed, not a single lump. She bounced experimentally. She wished she were graceful—not awkward. It would be nice to be so many things. It would be especially nice to have curly hair, like Father's. There was no use wishing to be as pretty as Mother—Allie had quite given up on that—but there was a possibility that her hair might curl someday.

It got tiresome hearing people say to you that you'd never be as pretty as your mother was. Worst of all was when they looked at you appraisingly and said: "Isn't it funny, with *two* such handsome parents . . . ?"

Funny that she didn't look like anyone in the family, didn't even resemble Mother's brother over in Alameda. Not, she conceded, that she *wanted* to look like Uncle Lewis, but it would be satisfying to have some family mark—like Mother's nose, or Father's mouth.

For a long time Allie had thought she must have been adopted, or found one night on the doorstep, until she'd heard Mother

say she hadn't weaned Allie until Allie was two years old. And Allie was quite sure that ladies did not nurse adopted or stray children.

"I'll 'Plak,'" Allie thought drowsily, "I'll 'Plak' that I get beautiful and . . ." "Plak" was a wonderful game. It meant "play like." You could play like you were so many things. You could play like you were passing this building, and it was quite late at night. . . . (In the "Plak" game you didn't have to figure out how you were allowed to be out alone at that hour.) Well, this building, a regular mansion it was, had a funny red glow at the very top; and you, Allie, broke in the front door and rushed up the stairs.

It was a huge, crackling fire. (Set by the Black Hand, probably—but Allie would figure that out later. Tracking down the Black Hand would be a whole new "Plak" game by itself.) You, Allie, roused all the sleeping people and got them out safely, and then, when you'd gone back to the top floor to make sure everyone was saved, there were the flames rushing up the stairs. You were caught!

Father and Mother were down in the street. They were together. They'd been out for a walk, making up, probably. And they'd seen the crowd and stopped to watch the excitement. Someone who knew the family (Aunt Lottie? Yes, Aunt Lottie; she could be in this, too.) would tell them that Allie was up there. . . .

The firemen would restrain Father from rushing in to rescue her. (In this "Plak" *she* was going to be the heroine. . . .) Well, anyhow, in the meantime Allie found a skylight leading to the roof, and she was so experienced in climbing (she could play fence-tag better than any of the other kids; and that was real life, not "Plak") she went climbing up and up to the roof.

The roof was on fire, too, of course, but right next door was a lower roof. . . . Closing her eyes, Allie made the wide jump and landed safely. The cries and murmurs of the people watch-

ing below came up to Allie dimly and faintly. Then *that* roof caught fire, and for a moment it looked as if . . . ah, but wait; next to that house was a still lower roof. . . .

She was being shaken up and down in the firemen's net, and she wondered how she'd gotten there. Overcome by the smoke, probably. Allie looked up. It was Father, shaking the bed. And calling her sleepy-head.

Breakfast was not as delicious as it should have been, because Father wouldn't let her dunk the French bread in the coffee. He didn't understand that that was most of the goodness of it—holding the bread into the coffee until it was well sopped. He didn't know that there was a special knack of getting bread, butter, and creamy coffee into your mouth all at the same time—all the flavors running together down your throat. Or how good coffee tasted when it had bits of butter floating around in it.

It was no fun at all when you had to take a small bite of the bread, then take a small sip of the coffee. It took too long, and it made it just like any other meal that you had to eat politely because grown-ups were watching you.

After breakfast, they cleaned the apartment thoroughly and then went shopping. They didn't shop on Fillmore Street; they took the California cable all the way down to Polk Street to the fancy grocery stores. It was exciting to walk leisurely through the big markets—to stop and admire the fruit and vegetable displays. They were like pictures—the eggplants and apples all so polished, everything so intricately piled up.

They bought one head of lettuce, crisp and cold, and two greens Allie had never tasted—watercress and romaine. Father picked out three firm tomatoes and a bunch of green onions. The vegetable man gave them the parsley for free.

Then Father and Allie saw the apple display, and even Father was impressed. They were mammoth red apples. Father said they were the largest apples he had ever seen, and he questioned that such large apples could have any flavor.

"Beautiful flav'," the vegetable man assured him. "Ex-tra fanc', ex-tra spesh'. Here, the little girl, let her heft it." He placed one of the apples in Allie's hands. And her two hands, held together, wouldn't even go around it.

Father bought one. For a special something, he said. And the apple cost twenty whole cents. The man wrapped it in soft paper, then put it in a bag, and Allie got to carry it. She was very careful, too.

Then they picked out three plump frying chickens.

"Why three?" Allie wanted to know, but Father said she would see. That was part of the surprise, too. Then Father bought a special kind of honey that came in a little stone jar.

The packages weren't a bit heavy, but Father insisted that they ride the cable-car back to the apartment. He said he didn't like carrying packages on the street.

They didn't stay at the apartment, just washed the vegetables and put them in the cooler to crisp, unwrapped the chickens and put them into the tiny ice-box, and then they were off again.

"Adventuring?" Allie wanted to know.

Father laughed down at her and said, "Child, child." Would Alice like to walk down to the Bay? If it were clear, they might be able to see the Gate.

"Oh, yes."

"Then afterwards we'll go downtown for lunch, and—" Father took a small envelope out of his vest pocket, showed it to Allie.

"A play? With real live people in it?"

"Yes."

The Bay was blue and quiet, but there was a high fog off-shore. They walked along the sand, watched the sea-gulls wheel and scream, and wished they had stale bread to throw.

As they walked back along Van Ness Avenue, Father told how all the big shops had opened up there after the Fire in '06. Father knew so many stories about the Fire. Where it had been stopped, they thought; where it had flared up again.

"We fought it house by house at first"—Father walked fast—"then block by block."

"Auntie Drue said you went down to the Bay, when all the people were going away in boats, and you made a speech."

"Leave it to Drue to remember that. I made no speech. I just called them deserters. They were, too. Deserting the town. . . ."

"And you and Mother were living way out on Haight Street then." Allie remembered that this was a funny story, and giggled in anticipation. "And you and Mother were sleeping in the back parlor, and there was a big piano in the front parlor. The folding doors between the rooms were left open that night. On the morning of the 'quake, the piano danced right through into your bedroom, and Mother woke up and saw it standing there by her bed, and she said, 'Harry Barton, I've had just about enough of your practical jokes.'"

But Father didn't think that was funny at all.

Allie sighed, and wished she could remember not to talk about Mother and past times. Now Father would stop talking.

When it was lunch-time and the walk had made them hungry enough, they took the street-car downtown to a special place that Father knew that made the best oyster stew on the coast.

It was called the Imperial and it had swinging doors and a long gleaming bar. Except for the stools in front of the bar, it looked exactly like a saloon.

Memory stirred and Allie looked above the bar. Shouldn't there be a great picture of an undressed lady on a red velvet couch up there? There was no picture, and Allie was puzzled. Had she dreamed? No, there was a big faded place, just the size of a picture. She turned to Father, excitedly, but he was talking to the man in the white apron.

"Just getting along fine, Dan," Father was saying. "Amazing what the medical men can do these days."

"Well, Mr. Barton, I'm sure glad to hear that. You've had quite a siege of it, all right."

"I'll soon be as good as new. I'll be going back to work." Father turned to her. "Alice, this is—"

"I know, Mr. Imperial." Both men laughed, and Allie went on. "I remember. I've—I *think* I've been here before." Sometimes she dreamed things, or made them up in the "Plak" game, and fancies turned out not to be real. She didn't want to be mistaken. "Haven't I, Father? There was a picture there—the lady looked so pretty against the red couch." Father looked stern, so Allie talked on very fast. "And you sat me up on the bar—down there—and there was a big table with lots of food on it. Oh, and there were pretzels, hard and salty. And—and I was wearing little white gloves and I had—I *think* I had a white velvet muff."

Now Father and the man were looking at her admiringly. "Well, say now," Mr. Imperial said, "there's a memory for you. Smart girl you've got there, Mr. Barton."

Father looked proud. "She must have been very small. They were just talking about prohibition when you decided to make the change over to a restaurant, Dan."

Mr. Imperial nodded decisively. "A long time ago. Imagine her remembering even the free-lunch table. . . ."

Allie became a little giddy from the praise. "And I had a glass of something pink . . . oh, it was a beautiful pink color. . . ."

"Grenadine," they said together. Allie sighed happily. For once, she had been right.

"Well now," Mr. Imperial said. "I wonder if we can't find a little grenadine and soda for the young lady."

He did find some, and it was the same beautiful color that Allie remembered and it had the same pink taste. She told Father, but he said one couldn't taste pink.

The oyster stew was thick and creamy and delicious and Allie got to eat all the little round crackers in the bowl on the counter. The crackers were free.

After the matinee, which was *lovely*, Father told her about other plays he had seen.

"I wish you had the chance to see more of the theater, Alice. The real theater—not these cheap nickelodeons. I want you to know the best. When you are older, I'd like you to see the Shakespeare plays."

(Allie must remember that. Left to herself, she would choose any nickelodeon, or best of all, the vaudeville at the Orpheum.)

"We could go to matinees together, Father, you and me."

"You and I," Father corrected absently. "Yes. But if I don't get to take you, if I—you try and go alone."

"Oh, I'll wait for you, Father."

Father gave her a strange, almost a sad look, but he didn't answer.

It was fun helping Father get the dinner. Fun mostly because she was going to get to eat it. Not like at home, where Mr. Stimson, Mr. Webster, and Mr. Pegley got the best of everything. Allie knew that food was dear, especially food like strawberries or asparagus, but once, just once, wouldn't you think the boarders would leave a little of the good food for the ones who had to eat in the kitchen?

Father made biscuits, the kind you cut out very carefully with a small glass. When the little oven was heated on the first gas ring, they put the pan of potatoes on the middle ring. They weren't in-the-jacket potatoes, either, but peeled, and cut into extravagant little balls. When cooked, they were going to be buttered and dipped in parsley.

On the third gas ring Father put the big black frying-pan and fried the chicken golden-brown while Allie set the table. The salad was made at the very last, and the coffee was put on to perc the moment the potatoes came off. And Father made creamy gravy, with a cupful of wine, if one could imagine such a thing.

Dinner was like a ceremony, though Father ate so little. He acknowledged all of Allie's compliments with great modesty. He was proudest of all of the fact that everything came out done at the same time.

Allie worried a little about all the chicken on the platter, but Father said they weren't going to eat it all. Part of it was to be saved for something special.

They had biscuits and the strange- but delicious-tasting honey for dessert. And Allie got another cup of coffee with all the rest of the pastry cream in it, because Father didn't use cream in his coffee and it would just go to waste after Allie had gone home.

They sat at the table for a long time, and Allie thought how wonderful an ending this made to her visit. They would do the dishes, tidy up, then—well, what would Father have planned for them this evening? He didn't have to take her home until ten o'clock and it couldn't be much more than seven, now. Mary Pickford was in "The Hoodlum" downtown. Maybe—

Doing the dishes, Father started asking questions again. Now he seemed very interested in her school lunches.

"I make my own lunch, Father, in the morning. Before school."

"What do you have, generally?"

"Oh, whatever there is around. Not meat, of course; that's too dear."

"Not *dear*. You mean expensive."

"All right, expensive. Except baloney, and I don't like baloney. Sometimes I have apple butter, or catsup. Once in a while peanut butter, but that *sticks* so. And let's see. An egg, if I have time to fry it. I mean, sometimes I'm ironing a fresh middy blouse or—"

Father nodded. "I knew it. Scraps. Leavings. And you probably have to cut the bread, yourself, and it's thick."

Allie was surprised. How did Father know? It was true. She could never cut bread even; it always came out lopsided and in thick humps.

"And no fresh fruit, either, I'll wager. I wouldn't be surprised, Alice, if you had to wrap your lunch in—in newspapers."

"Oh, no. We save all the bags and bread wrappers. And right now, we have a lot of wax paper. Aunt Lottie brings little rolls of it home in her stocking. It's very good wax paper, too. Heavy."

"You should be sent off to school each morning with a well-packed lunch-box," Father said crossly, "with a fresh napkin in it. Your sandwiches should be thin and dainty and cut in two. I've seen little girls carrying their lunch-boxes."

Father went into the other room and brought back a beautiful, blue-enameled lunch-box. It was the finest one Allie had ever seen; it even had a handle. It was better, really, than the two-toned ones the eighth grade girls carried. Oh, she would take such good care of it; she wouldn't bang it around or scuff it up.

Almost the very nicest part of the week-end-with-Father was fixing her lunch for Monday morning. Father said it would stay fresh in the box, and he wanted the fun of packing it. First, in his wonderful printing he cut Allie's name on the tin of the inside cover.

Then he salted and peppered the cooled, crisp chicken. The pieces, too, that Allie particularly liked; not wings or necks, which were her usual portion. Then four very thin slices of bread—well-buttered. Each piece of chicken, each little sandwich was wrapped in a double thickness of wax paper. Then whole pink-frosted cookies were tucked into the corners of the box. But there was no room left for the wonderful, the immense red apple.

"Father! Is that for my lunch, too?"

"Of course."

"Why, no girl at school has ever had an apple like that. Say, will the kids' eyes pop when they see that apple!"

"Kids are young goats," Father pointed out. Then he went on, "I'll put the apple separate—in a bag. And if there's too much

chicken for you, Alice, you share your lunch with some little friend. You do have a friend, a special one?"

"Oh, sure. Sure, Father."

Allie crossed her fingers. But it would bother Father if she told him she didn't. Although she was always looking for someone who would make a best friend, she hadn't gotten around to finding one just yet.

She doubted if she'd find that friend this term. She never got to stay after school to play, and no matter how she planned and promised herself that she'd get to school early in the mornings, she was always having to run the last half block to get in before last bell.

Of course, there was always Beulah. Beulah was a strange girl—three times now she'd been caught eating the school paste in the cloak-room. And she was always tugging at the front of her hair. There was a curl there that she twisted and twisted. All the time she was talking, or studying, she would be turning the curl—this way, then that way. Beulah was awful kind-hearted, though. And she had a complete, an absolutely complete set of *Elsie Dinsmore* books and each week she brought a new one for Allie, collected the old. She didn't read them herself. Beulah said reading was silly. Two things Beulah came out of her good-naturedness to hate. Books and boys.

"There now." Father snapped the lid of the lunch-box, set it next to the bag with the wonderful apple in it.

"I want," Father said suddenly, "oh, Alice, I want you to have all the things the other little girls have."

Allie didn't know what to say. Uneasily, she rubbed her hand back and forth on the smooth oilcloth on the table.

Soon, however, Father was brisk and properly grown-up again, and Allie was greatly relieved. How would Alice like to ride out to the Parnassus district and visit a friend of his?

"A lady—very nice. You may take your lunch-box along; I'll be taking you home directly from there."

Obediently, Allie got her coat, brushed it off well under Father's supervision, and without being told, went and washed her hands.

She was going to be very careful this time. Almost always, towards the last of visits with Father, things began dragging, and Father would seem tired, impatient, but trying not to show it.

Father had taken her visiting his friends before, but they had always been men. Men he had worked with, or men who were interested in union or book talk. He'd never taken her to visit a lady, before.

It was almost as if he knew what Allie was thinking, because he explained at great length. "This lady, a friend of Drue's . . . she's very pleasant, has this apartment—"

"Auntie Drue? Might Auntie Drue be there, too, Father?"

"Yes."

Allie wouldn't have missed going out to the lady's for anything. A chance to see Drue again. . . .

Chapter Five

WELL, the lady, who turned out to be a Mrs. Moffat, might be very pleasant, as Father said; but she was also very silly. She giggled.

Mrs. Moffat was pretty, but she had a coming-to-pieces look about her. Her fair, faded hair, done up in dips and frizzles, kept threatening to slip down; and the brown chiffon scarf around her thin neck kept coming undone. She wore a dress of brown tricolette, and it was heavy with scallops of braid. She wore two sets of beads—the pressed rose-leaf kind—and a string of coral.

"And is this your dear little girlie?" she wanted to know.

The lady got right down on her knees and looked into Allie's eyes. She looked so long and yearningly that Allie got embarrassed. She put her arms around Allie then, and sort of rocked her back and forth.

"Dear little tot," she said, "dear little tot."

"Oh, Mr. Barton." The lady stopped trying to rock Allie and stood up. "Remember what we were talking about at Drue's? I got it. I went right down to Newbegin's and got it. And you're to read it aloud to me, every word. I've been promising myself that treat since you said you might come visit me." She held out a leather book with gold writing on it.

"Well, now," Father said. "Imagine you remembering that." He took the book. "Great book, this."

"And your voice," the lady said, "to bring it all alive to me."

"Where do you want me to put my hat and coat?" Allie said.

The lady looked surprised, as if she'd forgotten Allie. Then she got fluttery again. '

"*Dear little tot. Such a square, sturdy little girl. Not much like you, is she, Mr. Barton?*"

Father was leafing through the book and didn't hear.

"I guess," Mrs. Moffat said, "I guess she resembles her mother?"

"Her mother?" Father looked up absently, then went back to the book. "No. Her mother is a beautiful woman."

The lady jerked Allie's coat. "Lay it on the couch, there."

Father set the book down and watched them.

The lady put her head to one side prettily and said, "I'll just bet I can guess your name." She closed her eyes, pretended to think hard, then said, "Alice! Your name is Alice." She trilled a few notes of *Sweet Alice Ben Bolt*.

Allie wondered what she was supposed to say. Fortunately, the lady didn't seem to consider a reply necessary, because she went on: "And you are very smart in school, too. And a great reader. A little bird told me so. Now I wonder if Alice can guess Mrs. Moffat's name . . . Hmmm?"

When Allie didn't—couldn't—answer, the lady said, "It isn't Virginia. It isn't Anne—how old is Anne?—it isn't Puddin' Tame."

"Bertha," Allie said desperately. "Martha."

"Oh, no! Don't tell me I look like a Bertha or a Martha!" She seemed to not want to play any more games, then, and said simply that her name was Sarah-Ellen. With a hyphen.

Now that was interesting. Allie'd never met anyone with two names before.

"Mama' will be so sorry she missed you," Mrs. Moffat told Father. "I've told her so much about you, she says she just feels that she knows you. She went over to our cousin's in Berkeley today. But she'll be home before midnight." Mrs. Moffat laughed

gaily. "My darling, conventional Mama'. She wouldn't dream of leaving her girlie alone one single night. To hear Mama' tell it, you'd think I'd never been married—never gone through domestic trouble. You'd think I was still a debutante."

It was interesting, too, Allie thought, the different names ladies had for "Mother." This lady called her mother "Mama'," the way the French teacher at school said it. When Aunt Lottie spoke of *her* mother, she said "Maw." And Uncle Lewis' wife, Aunt Maxine, said "Mama," and it sounded odd to hear a grown lady say "Mama"—just like a little girl. And then some people called their mothers "Mah." Mrs. Williams had called hers "Mom." . . .

"Now what," the lady said, "now what has Mrs. Moffat got that a little girlie might like? Pictures? Does our girlie like pictures?"

Mrs. Moffat reached for a heavy book on the table and handed it to Allie. "This is all about the 1915 Fair. But, of course, you're too young to remember, aren't you?"

"I saw Beechey fall," Allie said. "And I remember the Zone, and the Tower of Jewels. I remember the samples they gave away in little tin cans, but when I cut the can open, it was just filled with sand. And I remember eating the scones. And I almost saw 'Stella.' And home on our wall we have the picture and poem of the little duck babies and the night the lights went out at the Fair."

"Well," Mrs. Moffat said. "Well. Now shall we all get comfy?" She all but lifted Allie up on the couch, thrust pillows behind her back. They were pillows of leather, with pictures of Indian girls burned on them. They had beads on them, too, and they were scratchy.

Mrs. Moffat made a special spot for Father and herself under the fringed lamp. Father was to have the leather armchair because Mrs. Moffat knew what men liked. "There now." With reverence she handed Father the book she'd shown him earlier.

"Comfy?" she wanted to know. "Start your pipe; please do. I always say there's nothing like the smell of good tobacco."

"Where's Auntie Drue?"

"Shhh, girly. Your Daddy's going to read us beautiful poetry."

"But Auntie Drue—"

The lady put her finger to her lips and made her eyes very small. "Shhh . . . Shhh."

Father had a deep and wonderful voice for reading aloud. And he was gentle and quiet with words, letting them speak for themselves. And the lady had been right, it *was* beautiful. . . .

"—Open then the Door!

*You know how little while we have to stay,
And, once departed, may return no more."*

Allie remembered that Father had always loved to read poetry. He used to read it to Mother; sometimes following her around the kitchen, holding the book in one hand, making motions with the other.

"Yes, Harry, yes," Mother used to say. "But please, Harry, I've got to get this meat loaf into the oven. Why don't you go and sit down in the front room?"

Mother had never hung on every word of Father's, the way Mrs. Moffat was doing. *She* hadn't sighed soulfully or made soft little exclamations of rapture. Father read on.

*"Ah, my Belovéd, fill the Cup that clears
TODAY of past Regrets and future Fears:
Tomorrow!—Why, tomorrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n thousand Years."*

Allie leaned against the uncomfortable pillows and thought how beautiful poetry was. Especially grown-up poetry.

*"Ah Love! Could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,*

*Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mold it nearer to the Heart's Desire!"*

Allie's eyes stung. Oh, she wished—she wanted. . . .

*"And when like her, oh Sákí, you shall pass,
Among the Guests Star-scatter'd on the Grass,
And in your joyous errand reach the spot
Where I made One—turn down an empty glass."*

Father closed the book and sat quietly, not even puffing on his pipe. He looked as if his thoughts had gone far, far away. . . . Even Mrs. Moffat was quiet.

All three of them jumped a little when the doorbell rang.

It was Auntie Drue, and she seemed surprised to see Father and Allie. She smiled at Father when she saw the book in his hand, and Father looked funny—almost boyish.

"Harry," she said, "Harry, you and Omar. That man will lead you astray yet."

"Mr. Barton's voice," Mrs. Moffat said, "when he reads aloud . . ."

"I know." Drue was still smiling. "But you should hear him read Shakespeare."

Father looked just a little cross, but then he laughed with Drue, as if he were laughing at himself.

Mrs. Moffat didn't laugh. "I would consider it a privilege to hear Mr. Barton read Shakespeare."

Allie sat quietly, waiting for Drue to notice her. Auntie Drue wasn't beautiful, like Mother; or pretty, like Mrs. Moffat; but she had a . . . would *handsomeness* be the word? She held herself so straight—as if she were tall, instead of quite tiny. And her brown eyes were so sparkly, so alive; her hands were so quick to sketch a gesture, to complete an unspoken phrase. She never bothered about the things other people did, either. She

never minded if you forgot your manners, or if you sniffled because you'd lost your handkerchief.

There was something else about Auntie Drue. It would sound very silly if you tried to say it out loud, but Auntie Drue had a—well, a *waiting* way. She never grabbed. She would turn and look at you—and wait. Then, when you were ready, you stepped into her—Allie's thoughts stumbled, then picked up defiantly—all right, you stepped right into Drue's heart. And it was warm and quiet. And when you were ready to leave, Auntie Drue didn't try to hold you or question you.

And—here was the funny part, and the part that should make you sad, but didn't—you also knew that if you never stepped across that boundary, if you never crept into Drue's consciousness, she would not care one way or another.

Mother said that Auntie Drue didn't care about anything. Drue hadn't let herself care, Mother said, since that long ago day a beloved younger sister had died in secret and shameful agony. Drue alone had read the note her sister left.

"You and your charm," was all that Drue had said to her wealthy, handsome husband as she left his house that day, "You and your God-damn, killing charm!"

One thing Mother said she could never understand. Drue had not even waited for her sister's funeral. She had just walked away that morning and no one had heard from her for years and years.

Now Auntie Drue had a dressmaking shop down on Post Street. Just as soon as business picked up, she was going to get in two clever girls—French, if possible—and specialize in lingerie.

(Langz-er-ee, not lahng-er-ay, Auntie Drue said it was pronounced. She knew, because once she had lived in Paris.)

The langz-er-ee would be a specialty of the shop, and would be bought by the Bush Street ladies. And on the plate glass windows of the shop, in gold-leaf, Drue would have a simple, DRUSCILLA, MODISTE.

Now Auntie Drue came over and stood beside Allie and smiled down at her. Allie slipped her hand into Drue's, and was content.

"How's Mother, Allie?"

"She's—she's fine."

That was another thing about Drue. She was always talking about Mother to Father, and Father to Mother. She just would not understand about enemy camps. Sometimes it got quite embarrassing.

"Harry, come here. Look at Allie. I think she's going to turn out to look like you after all. Her eyes are the same color blue. Lil's eyes are hazel, aren't they? Though sometimes they seem green. . . ."

"Auntie Drue," Allie warned softly, "Auntie Drue." Didn't she *know* Father didn't like to talk about Mother?

But Father got cross for a different reason. "Auntie Drue, Auntie Drue," he said. "Must you call her that?"

"Not at all," Drue said. "She may call me Drue. After all, I call her Allie."

"I don't approve of little girls being so familiar with their elders," Mrs. Moffat said. "It's fresh. It's—it's not nice."

"Nonsense," Drue said. "Allie's not young, and I'm not 'elder'—yet. And Allie is fresh, thank God, and I'm not—nice." She smiled down at Allie. "Drue it is."

And it was like being given a present, Allie thought.

"Did you come alone, Drue?" Father wanted to know.

"No. Sam Ferris brought me. Or have you met him? Sells automobiles. Stutzes. I've always liked riding in Stutzes. He's downstairs now, tinkering with it. Ignition, or something, went wrong."

"What happened to your young band-leader, Drue?" That was Mrs. Moffat.

"He wasn't a band-leader, Sarah-Ellen; he just played in a band. He's still with Art Hickman, at the Rose Room."

Mrs. Moffat giggled. "You and your young men."

"I like young men," Drue said evenly. "Who doesn't?"

Then Father said it was time to take Allie home. He had to deliver her not later than ten o'clock.

Mrs. Moffat looked disappointed, and spoke enthusiastically about a Lady Baltimore cake that Mama' just happened to bake that morning. . . .

"Do you want some cake, Alice?"

"No, thank you, Father."

Then Allie stopped disliking Mrs. Moffat, and began to feel sorry for her, because Mrs. Moffat started chattering. And the more she chattered, the more expressionless Father's face got. And Allie knew exactly how Mrs. Moffat must feel. It was terrible when Father's face closed up against you and you kept trying to make it open again. You talked fast; you could hear yourself saying the silliest things, but for the life of you, you couldn't stop chattering. . . .

"Oh, Mr. Barton, stay just a little longer? Drue's young man will be coming up; of course you want to meet him. Perhaps—look, we could all go for a ride in the Stutz. It's early. We could go out to the Beach. We could drop the little girlie off, then—"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Moffat."

"But the cake? Really, you know, until you've tasted Mama's famous Lady Baltimore—and children love cake—you wouldn't deprive Alice—"

"You see," Allie said in sympathy, "Father's heartburn won't let him eat cake. And Lady Baltimore has ground-up raisins in the frosting, and raisins always make my tooth hurt—"

Then all conversation stopped while Father took her over to the light to examine which tooth hurt. Drue had to look, too. Mrs. Moffat wasn't interested.

She did, however, whisper loudly to Allie as she helped her

on with her coat. "Do you want to—er, *you* know? Wash your hands?"

Really, Allie thought, grown-ups' preoccupation with the washing of hands! Obediently, though, she followed Mrs. Moffat down the dark hall and went into the bathroom. She locked the door and looked at her hands; they were clean as anything. She ran the water, however, in case anyone was listening, and crumpled a towel.

She opened the medicine chest and examined the contents. One box of very pink Djer-Kiss powder. (Mother used Red Feather—and not so pink.) One chamois skin. A curling-iron and a box of Sterno. The medicines were not interesting at all. Carter's Little Liver Pills and two bottles of Lydia Pinkham's Compound for Female Complaints.

There was a narrow closet by the door, and Allie looked into that, too. A lady's union suit hung there, and Allie giggled. It looked so funny swaying back and forth—so long-armed, so long-legged.

When she got back to the front room, Mrs. Moffat's chattering had faltered to a few brief phrases and Father's eyes were quite glazed.

"Thank Mrs. Moffat for an enjoyable evening."

"Thank you, Mrs. Moffat."

Drue put her hand on Father's arm. "Take care of yourself, Harry."

"I'm fine now, Drue, really."

"Oh, you'd say that if you were—you'd say that anyhow, Harry. You and your stoicism."

Drue leaned down to put her cheek against Allie's. Drue never kissed anyone. "Give Mother my love. Tell her I'll be by soon."

As they left the apartment house, they saw a young man in a large plaid cap kicking the wheels of a red Stutz. Father said, "Good evening," and the man replied morosely. They might

have stopped—Father loved to talk automobiles; he was going to have a Hudson someday—but they heard their street-car coming.

Perhaps, Allie thought later, if she hadn't been so sleepy, she might have been able to think of something interesting to talk about, something that would have taken Father's mind off Mother.

All the way home in the street-car Father questioned her.

"Lottie's crowd," he started, "that comes to the house. They—sort of pair-off, don't they?"

"The men and ladies, you mean? Well, Aunt Rose always comes with Uncle Mart. Aunt Mabel likes both Uncle Neal and Uncle Bob. But Goldie Donovan says she doesn't believe in tying yourself down; she likes to play the field."

"Alice, Alice. The way you—well, never mind. Who is Lottie's special friend? And your—mother's?"

"Oh, Aunt Lottie doesn't like men, much. She likes to play cards and have fun, but Lottie says, 'once-bitten, twice—'"

"And your mother?" Father interrupted.

"Mother's just, well, nice to them all. It's her house. Half her house—"

"But there must be someone who likes Mother—especially well."

"Everyone likes Mother. Mr. Pegley says she is prettier than the Jersey Lily was. He calls her Lily."

"Oh, he does. Where does Pegley fit in?"

"Well—he doesn't know many people. He's—I don't know—sort of stiff. But he plays a good game of cards. So Mother and Aunt Lottie ask him down sometimes when the crowd comes. Aunt Lottie says she bets he's human, after all."

"What does Pegley look like?"

Allie couldn't say that he had a tight, mean face; that his lips were too red, and that he was always licking them. Or that

Mr. Pegley had a horrid, snuffling laugh. When you gave grown-ups descriptions like that, they said you were being impudent. Allie kept still.

"How old is Pegley?"

"I don't know, Father. Forty? Maybe he's forty."

"Ha. Your mother is forty-five."

"She *is*?" Allie was honestly surprised. (But Aunt Lottie and Mother had said she was to say they were thirty-nine if anyone asked her!)

"She was thirty-five when you were born, Alice. Figure it out. What does this Pegley do?"

"Oh, something downtown. Office manager. He's white collar, I know."

Father took a great deal of care lighting his pipe.

"So. So he likes your mother, does he?"

Allie didn't answer.

"Well, he must, from what you say. And I suppose he's always patting her arm—" Father looked down at Allie—"perhaps even puts his arm around her?"

Allie braced her feet against the floor to make the street-car go faster. Divisadero Street, Scott Street; just another block and they'd be home, and maybe Father would stop—

"Alice, why don't you answer me? I asked you a question."

"This is our street, Father. I must ring the bell."

At the corner, under the street-lamp, Father kissed her.

"I'll wait here until you get in," he said. "Be a good girl, and tell your mother to send you to the dentist for that tooth."

Father looked so lonely, standing there. And his face seemed white and pained. He held her arm, tightly. "Alice—what about Pegley? Tell me. *Tell.*"

"He—he kissed her," Allie whispered. "On the stairs. I . . . But Mother didn't kiss him back, Father. Really she didn't."

"What did she do?"

"She blushed. As red as anything. And she said, 'Oh, Mr. Pegley, you shouldn't.'"

"Good night," Father said. And turned and walked away.

Allie went up her stairs slowly. The house was warm and welcoming, and there were lights on in the dining-room. She walked down the hall, stood at the door and watched. The Crowd was playing poker. Mother looked up and smiled happily when she saw Allie.

"*There's my girl,*" she said, and put out an arm for Allie to walk into. "Want to sit beside me and bring me luck?" Allie shook her head. She felt so mean and miserable. Her darling Mother, who loved people and a good time, who worked so hard and was entitled to a little fun—and she, Allie, going around *tattling*. And it *hadn't* been Mother's fault. Old Pegley. . . .

Politely, she greeted the Crowd, answered Aunt Goldie's questions about school, told Uncle Bob what grade she was in now. She wasn't even interested in the cigarette that was burning, unattended, by Aunt Lottie's place. For a long time, she'd suspected that Aunt Lottie smoked—all those Melachrino boxes around the house—but so far she'd never caught her.

"Scoot along to bed," Mother said. "I'll be up before you go to sleep. Say good night nicely to everyone."

Allie obeyed, walked listlessly up to the hall bedroom. The bed wasn't made, but a brief inspection showed that it would do, with a little tucking in of bedclothes at the bottom. She couldn't find her nightgown; she'd sleep in her princess slip.

She put the lunch-box and the apple on the floor by her cot. She heard Mother coming, and snapped off the lights and jumped into bed. Mother put the lights on again, sat down beside her.

"Well, what kind of a time did you have?"

"All right."

"How's your father?"

"All right."

"Where did he take you?"

"He—he has a new place, an apartment. . . ."

"He has? Where?"

"I—I don't know. I didn't notice the address. . . ."

"Well, you must have noticed the street. . . ."

"No."

"What neighborhood?"

"Fillmore."

"Fillmore and what?"

"Mother, I didn't notice."

"Was it down toward Haight or up the other way?"

"The other way."

"McAllister? Surely not that district. . . ."

"No. Further. By the cable-car. . . ."

"Well, for goodness' sake, the cables just run on California or Sacramento. Which street was it?"

Allie turned restlessly. "California." (But she wouldn't tell the address, not if she were boiled in oil. She wouldn't, *wouldn't*.)

Mother was looking at the lunch-box and the apple. Allie told her about them. "If that isn't exactly like Harry Barton," Mother said impatiently. "You need shoes, you're walking on the ground—he buys lunch-boxes. Extravagant, extravagant. Allie, he's really feeling better?"

"Yes. His cheek is all cured. Just heartburn, now. He told Auntie Drue—"

"Drue? You saw Drue?"

"At Mrs. Moffat's . . . a friend of Father's. . . ."

Lottie came in, then, and stood at the foot of the bed.

"Listen to this, Lottie," Mother said. "Go on, Allie. Who is Mrs. Moffat?"

"Just a lady—we went out to her apartment. She—she, well, she's just a lady. Her name is Sarah-Ellen."

"How fawncy," Lottie said.

"What did you go out there for?"

"Just to visit, I guess. Father read poetry—out of a book."

"An affinity!" Lottie said. "That's what. Maybe he's found an affinity."

"No. Aunt Lottie, she's a widow."

"Grass-widow, I'll bet," Aunt Lottie said.

Then the questions came relentlessly. Allie told them about Mrs. Moffat's Mama', but it didn't help. In a last, desperate effort, Allie told about the long-drawered union suit.

"Don't ever worry," Aunt Lottie said, "*that* must belong to Mama'."

"Really, Aunt Lottie—Mother. The lady *was* nice. . . ."

Mother put her head down and kissed Allie. "Poor little tyke. She doesn't understand. Listen, Allie, you don't call women like that *ladies*. You call them women."

Allie began to cry, she didn't know why. She reached for the apple beside her bed and handed it to Mother. "For you," she said. "Please take it, Mother."

"I don't want your apple, Allie."

"I want you to have it. Oh . . . I'll feel so much better if you'll take it. Please."

Mother said not to be silly, and snapped off the light as she and Aunt Lottie went out the door.

"I—I didn't tell the address," Allie tried to comfort herself. "And I didn't—didn't tell about the gadget that keeps the electric meter from registering. I didn't. . . ."

She held the apple in her hands, turned and buried her head in the pillow, let the tears come hot and fast.

Betrayed. She had betrayed. . . .

1919-1920

"And pay your fare . . ."

Chapter Six

IT RAINED for weeks. Aunt Lottie said she'd forgotten what the sun looked like.

"Sunny California," Mr. Pegley mocked. He was annoyed with the weather. He was also annoyed with the government and its too mild program with Germany.

School was no fun at all for Allie. Her marks were lower than they'd ever been, and Mother scolded.

"Allie, these are disgraceful. Here I am, working and sacrificing, to keep you in school, and you won't even try to do well. Listen, if I had *your* brains. . . ."

Mother was always pointing out that Allie had brains, like her father, and it was embarrassing. Because it wasn't true; Allie knew she wasn't very smart. Oh, she had that funny memory that came to her rescue time after time; she could close her eyes and remember a page, a problem, and its solution. But she missed out on the things that didn't require memory: the homework, the notebooks that had to be kept up to date, the compositions she didn't get time to write.

Aunt Lottie and Mother hadn't had one answer to their ad to rent the room, and food prices were going up and up. Now eggs were seventy-seven cents a dozen, potatoes had gone to two cents a pound. Leg of veal was two-bits a pound, and chuck was thirteen cents. Sugar was practically unobtainable.

Then Allie's long, smoldering feud with Mr. Pegley became open warfare. Just between the two of them, of course; they were both too smart to let Mother or Aunt Lottie know.

In front of Mother Mr. Pegley was cold-polite to Allie, but he was always saying what Mother should make Allie do—what *he* would have Allie do if she were his child.

Allie had the advantage, at first, because of it being her job to make the beds before she went to school. She expended much care on Mr. Pegley's bed. If there weren't enough wrinkles in the bottom sheet, she painstakingly creased more. And she handled his pillow very gently, so as not to fluff it up the slightest bit.

Mr. Pegley won the next round, though. He thought of taking all the covers off his bed—even the bottom sheet—and strewing them around the room. He even took the pillow-case off the pillow.

This meant that Allie had to make the bed all over, every morning. She tried not tucking the covers in at the foot, but Mr. Pegley complained to Mother. (Which was decidedly unfair, and not sportsman-like at all.)

Mr. Pegley kept his top dresser drawer locked, too, as if he didn't trust people. It took Allie three days to find a key to fit the drawer. The contents weren't interesting. A dozen pictures of ladies running along a beach or sitting on rocks. Allie examined the pictures curiously and wondered if they'd been taken by that strip of beach near the Cliff house. She also wondered that the ladies—no, women—didn't catch cold, running around without clothes on. Or that someone didn't come along and see them that embarrassing way while the pictures were being taken.

There was also a gold bridge with two teeth on it, in the drawer. Allie didn't touch that. It made her shiver, reminded her of her own back tooth that ached almost all the time now.

Aunt Lottie wanted Mother to take Allie to the clinic to have her tooth filled, but Mother said she would wait until she got some money, then send Allie to an honest-to-God dentist.

Mother was funny about doctors and dentists. She went to the

Stanford clinic the time she hurt her shoulder, and Aunt Lottie always went to the University of California Affiliated Colleges for her varicose, but Mother wouldn't let Allie go to either one.

"No one's going to experiment on my child."

"Lil, you're silly. Those interns at the clinics are practically doctors."

"That's all right. But Allie's going downtown to a real dentist. Just as soon as I can send her."

There was a brief flurry of interest when Mr. Grant came to be a boarder. He was not too desirable, Aunt Lottie said, since he was just a carpenter, not a white-collar worker. He did look steady, though, and Gawd knows, they had to get the rooms *rented*. Mr. Grant took the back bedroom.

A carpenter, Mother mused. What did Lottie think of screening in the back porch and partitioning it off for Allie? It was right next to the kitchen, and warm. Then they could rent the hall bedroom. Mr. Grant, being a carpenter, could do the work for them. And they could take his wages off his room and board bill.

Aunt Lottie fussed a little and tried to point out to Mother that they would *not* be getting the work done for nothing—after all, they'd be feeding Mr. Grant—but Mother couldn't see it. She got the landlord to buy the lumber, the screen, and a door.

Mr. Grant was nice. Quite old, but very kind. Aunt Lottie worried about him all the time he was clambering around outside, building the room. She kept telling Mother: "Remember Drue's Aunt Gertrude, and the man who came to fix *her* roof."

Mr. Pegley didn't talk to Mr. Grant any more than to say, "Pass the salt." Mr. Webster and Mr. Stimson were pleasant enough, but Mr. Pegley took great pains to ignore Mr. Grant.

And Allie got into trouble again. And wouldn't you know it would happen the day that Aunt Maxine stopped in on her way home to Alameda after doing her Christmas shopping.

Aunt Maxine was her real aunt, by marriage to Uncle Lewis, who was Mother's brother. Uncle Lewis was nice, but Aunt Maxine was a severe lady. She always wore tailored suits and high lace collars that had bones in the net. Allie thought the collars must be too tight; Aunt Maxine often looked as if she were about to choke. Maybe that was what made her so cross, so disapproving.

Mother was always polite, but every time Aunt Maxine disapproved of the way Allie was allowed to run wild ("Skating all over the city, racketing around.") Mother would point out how smart Allie was.

"In the sixth grade," Mother would say pleasantly, "and only ten years old."

This made Aunt Maxine crosser, but she generally stopped her fault-finding. Because her two children, Sonny and Lenore (Aunt Maxine called Lenore, "Daughty.") were very, very dumb. They were always being held back at school because the teachers had a down on them.

Allie had rushed into the kitchen this day (rushing carefully, however, because she'd left one skate on) to beg Mother for five cents.

"Allie, you're all out of breath. Say how-do-you-do nicely to Aunt Maxine."

"'Lo, Aunt Maxine, how-are-Sonny-and-Lenore? Mother, please can I have a nickel?"

"What for?"

"Well, I have one nickel. And if you give me another, I can go down to the dry-goods store and buy a swell handkerchief. And I have to hurry, because he might go away, and I want him to have *one* present. . . ."

"What handkerchief? And who might go away?"

"The man. The man I met in the park."

Aunt Maxine shrieked. "Did he *lure* you, with candy?"

Allie stared at her. "Of course not. He's just sitting there, on

a bench. Up in Alamo Square. Mother, he's just out of the hospital, and he hasn't any money or friends, and no one to give him a single, solitary Christmas present. I told him not to go away. I said I'd be right back, so please can I have—"

"A *man*—in a *park*"—Aunt Maxine looked accusingly at Mother, and Mother's face got red.

Now, how, Allie wondered, was she going to explain? That the man had looked like Father—even talked like Father; that he seemed so *alone*, so sad? He was an interesting talker, too, the man was. He knew all the Latin names for flowers and shrubs. And he was polite and friendly, not nasty. . . .

"A man," Aunt Maxine said again. "Alice, don't you *know* what men do to little girls?"

"No. What?"

"Maxine," Mother warned.

"They *abuse* them," Aunt Maxine snapped. "*That's* what they do."

Mother had sent Allie to her back-porch room then. And told Allie to never, never speak to strange men again. And to take off that skate, she'd mark the linoleum.

"ABUSE (a-būz) *v.t.*," the dictionary said. "To ill-treat; to address with insulting language."

Grown-ups, Allie thought helplessly, *grown-ups*. That poor, ill man—waiting for a present that never came. . . .

The next thing that happened was that Mother, on Allie's account, lost her pride.

Mother had been downtown shopping, and she'd met Father and Mrs. Moffat right on Market Street.

"Face to face," Mother said to Aunt Lottie. "And we were wrong. She doesn't use peroxide. Her hair looks naturally blonde."

"Well, *tell*, Lil. What happened?"

Mother walked up and down the kitchen as if it were impossible to stand still for a moment.

"Nothing happened. He was very polite, of course, in that sarcastic, quiet way of his. Lottie, Harry doesn't look well at all—"

"Go *on*, Lil. What about Mrs. Two-Names?"

"She just nodded. And kept staring at me. We stood there on the corner talking. . . . Harry asked about Allie. I got angry. I said she needed so many things—that I was half out of my mind trying to get ten dollars to get her teeth fixed. I said that the least he could do was to *help*. . . ."

"And then?"

"Oh, Lottie! He kept looking straight at me, but he talked to *her*. 'Sarah-Ellen,' he said, 'will you please give Mrs. Barton ten dollars?' She opened her purse, took out a bill, and offered it to me."

"Ha!" Lottie said. "And you threw it right back in her face!"

"No," Mother said, "I didn't." She opened her hand, let a crumpled ten dollar bill fall onto the table.

"But, Lil—your *pride*!"

Mother's face looked strange. "Someone has to be practical. Sure, I've got no pride. But I've got ten dollars to get Allie's teeth fixed."

Allie, by the door, made her lips stop trembling. She would *not* be ashamed for Mother. It was something to be too proud to have pride! But she hoped that the dentist—when he drilled her teeth—would hurt and hurt. The pain would be expiation, of a sort, for what Mother had had to give up.

Chapter Seven

ONE GOOD thing about having your teeth all fixed, Allie thought: you got to eat candy again. It was about the only good thing that happened.

Mr. Grant took up a collection to get her a Christmas present from the boarders. Allie wasn't supposed to know, but she heard them talking. Mr. Grant thought a doll would be nice—little girls loved dollies—but Mr. Pegley refused to contribute unless they agreed to get something practical, like a shoe-order from Sommer and Kaufmann's. He talked Mr. Stimson and Mr. Webster into being practical, too.

Allie didn't know when she first realized that Mr. Pegley hated her, *really* hated her. It was rather frightening—being hated. It had never happened to her before.

At first, she thought it might be part of the game. When no one was around, Mr. Pegley would stare and stare at her. Whenever she looked up, she'd see his eyes. She tried locking eyes with him, out-staring him, but she always had to blink first, and that spoiled it.

Then Mr. Pegley took to shivering whenever she got near him. He would wrinkle his nose in distaste and pull away—as if it would be awful if Allie happened to touch him.

Allie really knew about the hating, though, the night he upset the bowl of hot soup all over her hands. He was the first at the table, and Allie had carried the soup in carefully. Mr. Pegley half turned in his chair, and just as she was setting the bowl down, he lifted his arm, deliberately.

Mother had scolded, and dabbed at the few drops of soup that had gotten on Mr. Pegley's coat. He was very patient. Mrs. Barton, Lily, was not to worry about the cleaning of the suit—but really, the carelessness of that child!

"I know," Mother said, "I know."

"Our star boarder," Aunt Lottie said, out in the kitchen. "Kid, you've got to learn to be more careful."

Allie had put butter on her hands, but they had smarted for a long while.

Whenever Mr. Pegley met her on the stairs, or in the hall, he would reach out and pinch her cheek, *hard*. "Fat," he'd say. "Getting to be a regular little fatty, aren't you?" And the pinching hurt.

Everything went wrong for days. Aunt Lottie got mad at her because Allie had shouted, "You're not my boss," at her. Mother made her apologize, but Aunt Lottie refused to make up.

Allie took to going to bed early, to have more time for the Plak game. Dimly, she knew that she was playing it too much; but it was so much nicer than *real* life. She would lie on her bed for hours and Plak exciting, wonderful things.

Even Drue, coming by one night with a new coat for Allie, did not stir her. Listlessly, she tried the coat on (it was checked and had pockets) and thanked her. She left Aunt Lottie and Drue and Mother sitting in the kitchen and went out to bed. There was a new Plak to finish thinking out. . . .

She left the door open, however, in case the grown-ups said anything interesting.

"Lil," Drue asked, "what's the matter with Allie?"

"I don't know," Mother said. "I've given up trying to understand her."

"Moody," Lottie volunteered, "like her father."

"Lil," Drue said, "Harry's back in the hospital."

"He is?"

"Yes. I went to see him."

"What's wrong?"

"I don't know. He says it's just indigestion. But they can't seem to clear it up. You know Harry. He'll never say much."

"Was—is *she* still on the scene?"

"Sarah-Ellen? No. And she was never as important as you made her out, Lil."

"He read poetry to her," Lottie said.

"Have you ever thought, Lottie, that it might have been nice to have someone to read poetry aloud to? Someone for company? Someone who thought you were just about the most wonderful person in the world?"

Aunt Lottie and Drue argued for a while, but Mother didn't say anything. Drue came out to tell Allie good night.

"What's bothering you, Allie?"

"Nothing is bothering me, Drue. Really."

(Allie had tattled once. She would never tattle again.)

"Well . . . your father sends you his love, Allie."

"Give him mine, Drue. I'm sorry he had to go back to the hospital. I was hoping . . . Did he say anything else?"

"Yes. He sent you a message. He said you were to take care of your Mother. Good night, Allie."

"G'night."

After Drue left, Mother and Aunt Lottie sat on, talking. Aunt Lottie said she simply couldn't figure out what Mother saw in Drue.

"Why, Lottie, we're old friends. I know Drue is different, and awful frank. But she seems to see things so straight and clear. . . . Like"—Mother's voice got low—"when I lost the baby, less than six months after the other boy. . . . People were kind, but what could they *say*?"

"Drue came, and she didn't—prattle, or talk about God. She didn't say that Time was a great healer. She said, 'Lil, this is the only thing that might help. Keep remembering that you've been hurt more than you can ever be hurt again—your whole life

long. If you can go through this, you can go through anything. Nothing will ever be so bad again.’”

“She was right,” Mother finished simply. “Drue was right.”

Aunt Lottie sighed. “How you ever got through it, Lil . . .”

“People talk about the world getting better,” Mother said, “but do you know how I figure the world *is* getting better?”

“How?”

“When I talk to young mothers, I find that they have not lost children—or as many children—as women of my day did. That’s how I know.”

After a while, Mother continued, “Having Allie . . . so late. It wasn’t fair to her; everything was over by the time she came along. I’d run out of patience, out of . . . confidence. Poor little tyke, I think she’s missed so much.”

“Listen,” Lottie said strongly, “listen. That one doesn’t miss anything. She’s a great little kid, Lil, a great little Allie.”

Mother laughed quietly. “She is, isn’t she? You know what, Lottie?”

“What?”

“I think I’ll send her over to Maxine’s and Lewis’s for Christmas. They’ll have a tree and a real celebration. There will be the children there for Allie to play with. I guess a boarding-house isn’t much fun for a youngster at Christmas.”

Aunt Lottie thought that was a good idea. “I wish we didn’t have to serve any meals that day.”

“Well, let’s not. Let’s take the day off. I’ll tell them.”

“Swell.” Allie could hear Aunt Lottie’s loud yawn. “I think I’ll stay in bed all that day.”

“Me, too.” Mother said.

Allie noticed, the next morning, that Mr. Pegley had not only left his top dresser drawer unlocked, he’d also left it open a good three inches.

She investigated. Well, for goodness’ sake. He’d cleared it all

out except for a pile of clean handkerchiefs. She rummaged further, and found an unwrapped Hershey bar with a third of the squares gone. She broke off two of the squares and nibbled them. Wasn't chocolate the *loveliest*-tasting stuff? She allowed herself a third square, but no more. She wouldn't put it past old Pegley to have counted the squares. She pushed the drawer back carefully, left it exactly as she'd found it.

For three mornings in a row, Allie helped herself to three or four squares of the chocolate. Mr. Pegley always had an almost full bar there, invitingly unwrapped. It was like the story, Allie thought, of the magic kettle that was always miraculously full, no matter how much one ate out of it. Maybe Pegley was sorry for the way he'd been acting. Why else would he leave the drawer open that way, keep it so well stocked?

It could be the Christmas spirit working in him. Mr. Pegley was doing a lot of talking about what he was getting Mother for Christmas. He made an awful big thing of what it was going to be.

(Allie bet it would turn out to be a shoe-order.)

Twice in one month, now, he had escorted Mother and Aunt Lottie downtown to a show. He even took them for sodas at the Golden Pheasant afterwards. And for a tightwad like Pegley, Aunt Lottie teased Mother, that looked serious. Mother blushed, and said for Lottie to stop.

Pegley was funny, all right, all right, Allie thought. There he was, supplying her with candy—surely he wasn't dumb enough to think he was eating it all himself?—but in the evenings, when she brought up the clean towels, he'd sit in his chair by the window and glare at her in his usual hateful fashion.

Allie didn't mind that, or the cross things he said to her as he sat there. It was when he was out of the chair, walking around the room, that Allie moved warily. She was getting pretty good at keeping out of his reach. That pinching *hurt*.

The Thursday night before Christmas, Mother and Aunt Lot-

tie went down to the big whist game at Cotillion hall. The score cards were only a quarter—they might win one of the turkeys. Allie sat on in the kitchen, catching up on her homework.

It was late when Mr. Pegley came down. For a drink of water, he said. Allie sat very still. If he walked towards her, she'd scoot out to her room on the back-porch; fasten the screen door behind her.

But Mr. Pegley stayed by the sink, and he took an awful long time drinking his water. Then he got water all over his chin, and searched for his handkerchief. He looked in every pocket.

Silly, thought Allie. There was a dishtowel right next to him.

"Alice, run up and get me a clean handkerchief out of my top drawer."

Allie obeyed. She was used to doing what grown-ups told her to do.

She took a clean handkerchief off the top of the pile. The end of a Hershey wrapper protruded from the bottom. Allie reached. She'd eat *six* chocolate squares tonight, and to heck with—

She cried out, and snatched her hand back. Oh, it hurt! Something had. . . . She looked down and cried out again. A mouse-trap had snapped across the tips of three fingers.

Allie fumbled at the trap, but the tears kept getting in the way; she couldn't see what she was doing. . . .

(The skinned knees, when you fell down skating; the times you banged your crazy bone; when you cut your finger with the bread knife—they didn't hurt as this was hurting.)

The flesh of her fingers was swelling around the trap. Oh, maybe she would never be able to get it off! And one fingernail was blackening. . . .

Allie stumbled down the stairs and out to the kitchen for help.

"Take it off," she begged Mr. Pegley. "Please. . . ." She held out her shaking hand.

"Take it off yourself," he said. "If you'd keep your hands where they belonged, they wouldn't get hurt. Naturally, I thought a mouse—"

"No," Allie mumbled, her head bent over her hand, "no. You didn't think it was a mouse."

It was easy to unsnap the trap if you watched what you were doing, if you weren't hot and hurting any more. If you were cold—so cold you could not keep from shivering.

"I'll simply tell your mother that I thought a mouse—"

He knew she could not tell Mother how she had hurt her hand.

Allie dropped the trap on the floor and walked out to her room and threw herself across the bed. She put her hand under her cheek. Maybe that would lessen its throbbing.

"I suppose you think this was all very mean of me." Mr. Pegley stood at her door. "But you are really the most hateful child. You have never liked me, Alice. You're always thinking up things to annoy me."

Why didn't he go away? He had won, as grown-ups usually did. Why must he keep talking about it?

"You'll need a lot of lessons before you learn proper behavior, young lady," the voice went on. "I'll break your spirit if it's the last thing—" Mr. Pegley broke off talking, and Allie sat up.

Someone was coming up the back stairs. Mother and Aunt Lottie, home from the whist game? Now Allie would get what-for, because Pegley would naturally tell— No, Mr. Pegley was leaving, hurriedly. He all but ran out of her room.

Maybe—maybe he'd be satisfied now? Maybe he wouldn't tell on her? Was that too much to hope for?

Mother and Aunt Lottie didn't even go to the kitchen first. They stood right at Allie's door. Mother's face, in the light from the kitchen, looked funny—almost scared.

"Allie!" Mother demanded, "who was that? In your room?"

"Gawd, kid," Aunt Lottie's face loomed over Mother's shoul-

der, and it looked as queer as Mother's did, "you've been told to keep your door locked."

Allie hid her hand under the pillow. "It was just Mr. Pegley."

"In here with you? In the dark?"

"I—I guess I just forgot to put on the light."

"What—what was he doing?"

"Just talking, Mother."

"Talking what? Allie, answer me! Was Mr. Pegley talking—well, not nice things?"

Allie lay very still. A dark and obscure knowing rose up in her until her throat was tight with it. And old Pegley *liked* hurting people. Mother didn't know that about him. And she wouldn't believe. And Father was in the hospital. "Take care of your mother"; he'd sent the message to her—to Allie.

"You mean," Allie answered carefully, "not-nice things—like the pictures?"

"What pictures?"

"All those pictures Mr. Pegley has of the naked ladies. I mean—women."

Aunt Lottie gasped. "The old goat!"

Mother's voice was harsh. "Allie, did he touch you? Did Mr. Pegley touch you?"

"Tonight? No, Mother."

"What do you mean by 'tonight,' kid? Has he ever?" Now Aunt Lottie looked mad.

Allie waited a moment. "Well, he's always pinching me."

"Pinching you? Where?"

There was something else that must be gotten in here. . . .

"Go on, Allie. Tell Mother."

"Oh, just everywhere." With her good hand she gestured, then hurried on. "But sometimes he's nice. He's always giving me—candy."

"You never know," Aunt Lottie marveled. "Why, that Whited Sepulcher!"

"Come on, Lottie," Mother said. "He goes out of this house tonight. Allie, you get undressed and into bed. And try not to think about him. You won't have to worry about him any more. Though why you didn't tell me, or Aunt Lottie—"

"You might have thought," Allie said, "I was making up—stories."

"The dirty devil," Aunt Lottie said. "You get a good sleep, kid. 'Night."

"Of course," Allie pointed out, "of course he'll *say* I'm telling a story."

"Of course he will, kid, but he won't get far with us. Come on, Lil."

Mother kissed Allie, which was unusual, and followed Aunt Lottie.

Allie was suddenly, overwhelmingly sleepy. She held her hand up to the light. It was still swollen, but not nearly as badly as before. She would probably lose that fingernail; she'd heard that if they turned black, they'd fall off. But she'd also heard that a new one grew in its place, and it didn't hurt. It would be interesting to watch. Funny that her hand didn't hurt—any more.

Chapter Eight

GOING-across-the-Bay took almost as much preparation as visits-with-Father. There was the same frantic search for clean underwear (Aunt Maxine was the prying kind); the last-minute sewing on of buttons; and Mother made Allie take a proper bath; came in and washed her hair right while she was in the tub. And Allie got to wear the new coat Drue had made for her, and the new Christmas shoes.

Aunt Lottie and Mother admired her.

"The kid looks like a million dollars, Lil. Drue sure gets style into the things she makes. Maxine won't find anything to carp about *this* time. Wait, Allie." Aunt Lottie got her bottle of Indian Hay, put a drop of the perfume on the coat lapel, another on a clean handkerchief.

"Now Allie, take care of that coat. Don't get a single spot on it, you hear? Goodness knows when you'll get another one so fine."

"Yes, Mother."

"And mind Aunt Maxine."

"Yes, Mother."

"And look, Allie, try to be a good little girl. Don't be naughty, or do crazy things, like last time."

"But all I did was tell Sonny to—"

"I know. To cut his mother's clothes-line down, so you could tie each other up."

"I told him just to untie it; we could have put it back. But he's so dumb he cut it. And we *needed* that rope; we were captives."

"What were you when you were fishing the pollywogs out of the creek with Aunt Maxine's best veil? Or rigging the clothes-basket with ropes and sending it up to the top of the cherry tree?"

It would be kind of fun, Allie thought, to finish that cherry tree game. . . .

"Aunt Maxine considers you a bad influence, Allie. She says Lenore and Sonny are never naughty unless you're around."

"It's Christmas, kid," Aunt Lottie said, "and peace-on-earth. Give Maxine a rest, for once. Although I, personally, would say that it would do that one good to stir her up, to get her mind off her precious house."

"Why, Maxine's a wonderful housekeeper, Lottie," Mother protested. "And such a good manager; so saving. Puts up all her own fruit and jellies, never loses a jar. . . ."

"So she makes good jelly," Lottie said. "And she puts newspapers down on her carpets to walk on. And when you lean against a pillow on Maxine's davenport, she goes half crazy until you sit up again. Then she runs over and fluffs it up." Aunt Lottie made a face. "If that's being a good housekeeper, I feel sorry for Lewis and their kids, that's all I've got to say."

Mother put her hat on and took Allie down to the street-car that went directly to the ferry building. Allie was deeply humiliated. As if she didn't know all the street-car numbers and their exact routes!

"Uncle Lewis will meet you at the ferry building," Mother said, "and take you across the Bay. Tell him to telephone to me from this side, so I'll know you've met each other all right. Don't let him wait until he gets home; that would be long-

distance, and your Aunt Maxine is a little queer about using her telephone for long-distance. And be good, Allie."

The red-berry wreath on Aunt Maxine's front door had slipped to one side just enough to give the neat bungalow an unfamiliar and rakish look. Aunt Maxine discovered it, however, when she opened the door for them, and gave the wreath a tug that straightened it up immediately.

The Christmas tree in the front room had candles on it, but they weren't to be lighted because of the danger of fire. And they weren't to be touched, Aunt Maxine said. But you could look all you wanted.

Sonny and Lenore were pathetically glad to see Allie, and she thought how easy it was to like people who liked, even admired, you. Because, really, if Sonny and Lenore weren't her very own cousins, she would consider them *lumps*. They were always so quiet—no get-up and go about them at all.

"What shall we play, Allie?" they begged now. "Make us up a game, Allie."

"A quiet game," Aunt Maxine instructed. "And speak up for yourselves, you two. Don't let Allie boss everything."

Allie was too bossy, that was another of Aunt Maxine's complaints. Yet she was always after Lenore not to be so timid and quiet, telling Sonny to stand up for his rights.

They could play cards on the floor, Aunt Maxine said. They could play Old Maid. They were not to play Rob Casino, however, because that was not nice or character-building.

As soon as Aunt Maxine left the front room, Lenore and Sonny put down their cards and looked at Allie. "Do it, Allie. *You* know."

"Do what?"

Her cousins giggled excitedly. "*You* know. Rattle them!"

"You kids are crazy. I don't know what—"

Sonny and Lenore looked at her meaningly, then looked at the

eucalyptus portières that hung on both sides of the folding doors.

"Do it, Allie. Please do it."

Oh. They meant the portières that were made of gilded eucalyptus seeds all strung together, the portières that were Aunt Maxine's pride and joy. They were never, *never* to be touched, but they made such a whooshy, fascinating sound that Allie could hardly bear to pass them without making them tinkle. And the sound drove Aunt Maxine wild.

"I can hear you," she'd shout from wherever she might be in the house. "Alice Barton, you stop touching those new portières. . . ."

Allie swaggered a little, now. Imagine Sonny and Lenore remembering! Recklessly, she put out a hand and with a prodigal sweep set the portières to jumping and clattering.

Aunt Maxine rushed in, her face red.

"I—I brushed against them," Allie said.

Lenore, on her knees on the floor, rocked ecstatically; Sonny rolled on the rug.

For once, Aunt Maxine never said a word. In truth, Allie felt silly herself. It didn't seem normal that her cousins should go into spasms of joy over such a little thing as the forbidden sound of portières.

"I'm sorry," she said. (She was, too, for a change.) "Come on, kids, let's play Old Maid and be quiet—like your mother says."

(She must keep remembering that *this* was the visit wherein she intended to be so well-behaved, that Aunt Maxine must know immediately that Allie was really not a bad influence.)

Lying in bed that night, Allie was able to tell herself that she *had* been good, all day long. If you excluded telling the ghost story that made Lenore scream so loud her mother thought she was having a fit.

Now Lenore, Allie thought, was a nice little girl, the kind of

little girl Father would approve of. Lenore washed her hands without being told; her mother made her brush her hair every night; and Lenore had stacks, *stacks* of clean underwear in a white-painted bureau that was her very own; and all her stockings were rolled into pairs.

Allie guessed that Lenore was what grown-ups considered being properly brought up. It was all right. Some things were nice. Like having one's own room, a place for everything. ("And everything in its place"—Allie could hear Aunt Maxine.) It would be, well, *different* not to be always upset or rushing, or hunting frantically for schoolbooks or an unbroken shoe-lace. On the other hand. . . .

Allie considered. Even when you had a room of your own, you had to keep it awfully neat. You couldn't loll on your bed, or read there, or hide food under your pillow to eat late at night while you were finishing some exciting book. ("Beds are for sleeping," Aunt Maxine said.)

You couldn't go skating, or adventuring, whenever you wanted. If you were Lenore, you had to tell *where* you were going, *who* you were going with. Then you were told what time you must be back. You were subjected to endless questioning. And some of the questions were about the most *personal* things. ("Have you done your Duty yet this morning, Daughty?")

Allie shivered. And decided she didn't want to be a properly-brought-up little girl. There was a great deal to be said for having grown-ups who were much too busy to bother with you all the time.

She watched Aunt Maxine inspect Lenore's hair, give it another ten good strokes with the brush, then send her to climb into bed. Allie and Lenore got to sleep together because it was Christmas Eve. But they were to turn their backs to each other *and* keep their hands outside the covers, and they weren't to talk.

"I'll be listening," Aunt Maxine threatened. "There's to be

no whispering about—well, about anything. Do you hear, Allie? Daughty minds her Mama, but you—”

“I won’t talk. Honest, I won’t.”

“Good night, girls. And Merry Christmas.”

Merry Christmas. Oh, she’d forgotten to wish Mother a Merry Christmas.

Chapter Nine

BREAKFAST on Christmas Day, Aunt Maxine said, was purposely light, because they would be having an early dinner. Uncle Justin had to work on holidays. (Uncle Justin was married to Aunt Maxine's sister, Julia, and was therefore Sonny's and Lenore's uncle. But Allie had to call him Uncle, too, because it was respectful.)

Sonny and Daughty, Aunt Maxine went on, could open their presents after they'd gone to church with their father. The good Lord would forgive her for not going this morning. After all, with such an early dinner to get; and even with Jul coming over to help. . . .

Allie put on her new coat, her new hat.

"But you don't have to go," Aunt Maxine said. "It's not your church."

"I don't mind. I go to all kinds of churches."

"I know," Aunt Maxine said. "But this happens to be the morning *our* church has a little party and gifts for the children who have come to Sunday-school—their *own* Sunday-school—all year. Do you see?"

Allie saw, and took off her hat and coat.

When Lenore and Sonny had gone, Allie sat down on the newspapers in the front room and looked at the Christmas tree. She fingered the presents underneath it; figured out one of Sonny's, two of Lenore's.

Julia came in—"the front way," she joked, "because it is

Christmas," asked questions about Mother, then went on out to the kitchen to help.

Julia and Aunt Maxine saw each other every day. They lived just a block apart, and did all their shopping and sewing and meal-planning together. They would talk for hours about people they had known. "Who did the Carson boy marry?" Aunt Julia would ask. "The youngest Wilson girl, the one who was so wild," Aunt Maxine would answer. "Or—no, wait, Jul—wasn't it the middle daughter, the one with weak eyes?" But they never told gossip stories about their own family. Aunt Maxine was very proud. She was always saying that there'd never been a divorce—or an operation—in *her* family.

The air was warm and chokey from the gas log in the grate. If you watched the blue flame sputtering, it could almost put you to sleep. The floor got hard, so Allie tried the leather chair; but it was slippery, and it was such an effort not to lean against the pillows.

There was a couch in the dining-room. It was covered with the dark red plush that had been the old portières. Allie had seen Uncle Lewis lying down there once, so perhaps it would be all right for her to—

She stopped tiptoeing around the dining-room table to listen to the voices from the kitchen. Were Julia and Aunt Maxine talking about *Mother*?

"I saw Lillian the day I went over to match that brown silk," Aunt Maxine was saying.

"I'll bet she's lost her looks by now," Julia sounded happy. "Running a boarding-house, working hard."

"N-n-o," Aunt Maxine answered.

"Isn't she even getting *stout*?"

"No. Well, she wouldn't, I guess. All that energy she has. . . . No, Lillian looks the same as ever. I don't know how she does it."

"Cold-creams," Julia said. "And maybe she touches up. And she's easy-going, Max; she doesn't worry."

"And," Aunt Maxine said pointedly, "she's got no man around to have to placate, to fuss over, to—you know. That helps."

"Where's Harry now?"

"I don't think she sees him. I believe his mother helps him out financially. Although the old lady must have precious little left."

"Well, Max, the way I see it—Lillian has had her day. Those years up in Reedstown, when the Bartons were still cocks-o'-the-walk—"

"You're right, of course. But you know something? I wouldn't be surprised but what Lillian isn't more content down here. It was always an effort for her to have to live up to old Mrs. Barton's ideas of being a lady. I'll bet Lil is happier, right now, in an old boarding-house, than she was up there in Reedstown."

"She always did like a lot of people around. Harry didn't. Is she still a classy dresser?"

"A little loud for my taste. But still elegant. And I just wonder how she does it—"

"I expect she gets everything on sale, or wholesale, where she works. I've always thought those salesladies put the best costumes away for themselves."

"Or maybe—Jul, had you ever thought they might be *presents*?"

"From men? Max, you mean—"

"Well, two women alone—she and that Lottie—"

"Hmmm. And Lillian *is* inclined to over-friendliness. But maybe not, Max. I think she likes compliments and attention, but I don't believe she's much on—"

"Listen. She's Lewis's sister, and I'm his wife, and I wouldn't say this to another person in the world but you, Jul; but *I* think Lillian Barton is fast. And *no better* than she *ought* to be. There!"

There was a silence, then Julia said, "My, my. Here, Max, I'll chop that celery; you get to the mayonnaise. . . ."

The clatter of the eggbeater and the sound of the chopping stopped further conversation, and Allie took her hands off the back of the dining-room chair they had been gripping. She lifted her skirt and rubbed at the moist finger-marks that marked the chair.

As quietly as she could, she walked through the front room and hall, and into Aunt Maxine's bedroom. She picked out the biggest, sharpest hat-pin that was in the strawberry pincushion on the dresser.

Just as quietly, she let herself out the front door, walked around the side of the house and into the dark, cool basement. Judiciously, she inspected the jars of jellies that gleamed on the newspaper-covered shelves.

Blackberry? Yes. Pineapple and apricot? She had heard Aunt Maxine say that was such a chore to make—all that stirring. And marmalade. Allie didn't like marmalade.

Neatly, precisely, like a great surgeon at work, Allie pressed the hat-pin down through the white paraffine; lifted each cover just enough to break the seal.

There now. The bugs that you couldn't see, but were always in the air, would get in and make the jellies "work." And never again would Aunt Maxine be able to brag that in all her years of jelly-making, she had never lost a jar.

Dinner came too early, Allie thought. That must be it. She could not work up any hunger.

Aunt Maxine, red-faced and anxious, stood by Uncle Lewis' side while he made the first cut in the turkey. If this bird wasn't juicy, what she was going to tell the butcher!

The next anxiety was the dressing. *Had* she put too much sage in it?

They all tasted. No. It was the best dressing any of them could remember.

How about the gravy? Too dark? Did they like the giblets chopped up in it that way? Maybe she should have strained the cranberry sauce. Although some people relished the whole berries. . . .

Allie ate stolidly and wondered if that feeling in her chest was wickedness—come to stay. Maybe she was what people called “abandoned to wickedness.” Probably. Because she had liked being wicked. She would do it all over again.

And Days of Atonement always came. Allie knew she could reckon on a terrible what-for, the very first time a jar was opened. Aunt Maxine was one of the smart grown-ups; she’d spot those hat-pin holes immediately, and unerringly place the guilt on Alice Barton.

Dinner dragged to its heavy close; and everyone sat on and said how much, how far too much, they’d eaten.

When the telephone on the wall in the kitchen rang, Aunt Maxine jumped, and looked anxious again. It rang three times before she could gather herself together enough to answer it.

“Hello? Hello? Hello?” Aunt Maxine talked even more loudly, more distinctly, than she usually did.

“Lillian? Is something wrong? What? What? Oh. Well, Merry Christmas to you, too, but why you should call long-distance just to . . . Just a minute, Lillian. Hold on, Lillian. I’ll get Lewis. I get too nervous talking over long-distance. Lew-is! It’s your sister. . . .”

Aunt Maxine came back to the table, shaking her head.

“It’s not like Lillian to be so extravagant.”

Allie could not hear Uncle Lewis’ words; just the rumble, rumble of his voice. Then he came back and sat down.

“She wanted to wish us all Merry Christmas.” He looked at Allie. “Said for you to be a good girl. We had a fine connection; I could hear Lil as plain as if she was in the next room.”

The telephone bell rang again, stridently, demandingly.

Uncle Lewis said it must be a wrong number, but when he

answered he called into the dining-room: "It's your mother again, Allie. Said she didn't get to talk to you."

"Two long-distance calls," Aunt Maxine said, "in *one* day."

Allie was weak with excitement. She could hardly push her chair back.

"Hurry, child, hurry," Julia scolded.

"Talk fast," Aunt Maxine instructed. "It costs *fifteen* cents if you talk a second overtime."

Uncle Lewis tilted the mouthpiece of the telephone downwards, handed Allie the receiver.

"Hello? Hello, Mother?"

"Well, Allie, Merry Christmas."

(Oh, Uncle Lewis was right; it was exactly as if Mother were in the very next room!)

"Are you having a good time, Allie? Uncle Lewis tells me you've just finished dinner. . . ."

"Yes, Mother."

"Now what are you going to do?"

"Dishes, I guess. What are you doing, Mother?"

"Just sitting around. Lottie's in bed with her 'my-graine.' . . . And—well, after all, it's Christmas. Look, Allie, could you come across the Bay all by yourself?"

"You mean now, right *now*?"

"Well, you're a big girl, and you could always ask for directions, and I've been thinking—"

"I'd—I'd like to, Mother."

"Now listen, this is what you do. You ask Uncle Lewis for his commute ticket—he won't be using today's—and you have him put you on the right train. You know how to change to the boat, don't you?"

"Oh, *yes*."

"Take a Key Route. And you sit inside. No hanging over the railings, you hear?"

"Yes, Mother."

"I'll meet you on this side. At the ferry building, by the flower stand. We'll do something together. Walk up Market Street. . . . We might even go into Haas' and have a dish of ice-cream—would you like that?"

"Mother, I'll catch the next train. And I'll be careful, really I will."

"Be sure to thank Aunt Maxine for a lovely visit."

"I will, I will. Good-bye, Mother. Good-bye."

Allie hung up the receiver, put her forehead against the mouth-piece of the telephone. Why, it was vibrating—shaking. She could feel it all through her body.

She would do everything just right. The train, the boat, Key Route. And when she got to San Francisco, Mother would be standing between the flower stall and the candy counter. Mother would be wearing her best suit, the jabot that looked like real lace, her tailored beaver hat with the dotted veil. She would look so beautiful, standing there. . . .

And as Allie walked through the waiting-room, Mother would see immediately that Allie hadn't gotten a single spot on the new coat. And Mother would lean down, put an arm around Allie, and say, "*There's* my girl. . . ."

And then it would be Christmas.

Chapter Ten

THE CENTURY was out of its teens, now, and into the twenties, and everyone seemed to think that was a good thing.

At the house, 1920 started out in great style with a New-Year's Eve party. An on-the-spur-of-the-moment party, Aunt Lottie said, which always turned out to be the best kind.

On-the-spur-of-the-moment, Allie thought. Every once in a while, grown-ups used words or phrases that made little pictures. If you closed your eyes, you could see the moment rushing by, could see someone catching it by the spur on its heel, holding it. . . .

"And the party didn't cost us a cent," Mother told Aunt Lottie. "In fact, we came out ahead. For dinner tonight, I can devil those crabs that are left over."

"I wish," Aunt Lottie said, "that there was one small bottle of beer left."

"Lottie!"

"Now, Lil. I was good last night, wasn't I?"

"Yes. But you know what it does to you."

"Lil, what did you think of Donovan's gentleman friend last night?"

"Very nice. But sort of bewildered-looking."

"Well, you'd look that way too, if all you started out to do was take your lady-friend to a quiet dinner at the St. Francis, then end up giving a New-Year party for fifteen strangers."

"He was a good sport about it."

"Goldie Donovan," Aunt Lottie shook her head slowly from side to side, "that Goldie Donovan has the nerve of a brass monkey. And that system of hers! The way she rates her gentlemen-friends—"

"Rates them?"

"Didn't you know? She figures ahead. If he's got a lot of money she shares him; pays back her obligations that way. Like the one last night. Goldie Donovan's been coming to parties of the Crowd for a long time now, and it's just about her turn to entertain. So she got *him* to do it for her last night. See?"

Mother looked a little shocked.

"Donovan's got that kids of hers in military school," Aunt Lottie defended, "and she's determined to keep him there. She can't do it on what Bon Ton pays her, even counting big commission weeks. So—she figures on gentlemen-friends for all her eating and party expenses. Lil, do you know that Goldie has trained herself to get by on one big meal a day?"

"Dinner? Or lunch?"

"Well, it depends. She keeps a little book. Yes, she does, honest. She knows what days her buyer-friends will be in town, and she has local guys, too, to fill in. Like Maury, the one she generally brings out here."

"I like Maury."

"Well, so do I, but he's only an assistant buyer . . . he's good just for lunch dates. Now say that Donovan has Maury take her to lunch on Monday. She never orders a sandwich or a salad. No, sir. She suggests the States, or the Poodle Dog, and that girl eats a complete meal."

"Don't the—the friends complain, Lottie?"

"No. Men like to see women eat hearty. And Goldie's smart; she watches the right-hand side of the menu. She eats substantial, but not expensively. That takes care of the big meal for Monday, see? So she doesn't accept any invitations for Monday night.

She says to whatever guy asks for a date, 'Make it Tuesday.'"

"What does she do on Tuesday?"

"Well, Tuesday, probably, she makes it dinner. She only gets an hour for lunch—hour and a half if Lever's in a good mood, and you can't really do justice to a meal. . . . Where was I?"

"To Tuesday."

"All right. On Tuesday night she goes to dinner with the new guy."

"Yes, but Lottie, Goldie doesn't get a date every day, does she?"

"No. That's where the little book comes in. She figures ahead. She's got Tuesday night's dinner, see, but no dates for Wednesday. On Tuesday night, if her escort is local, she says she's got to stop by the grocery store to get some milk for her kitty. And as long as they're right there in the store—don't those oranges look delicious? Goldie gets a sudden craving for oranges, for some kind of fruit. Well, you can see what happens, can't you?"

"Sure. He pays for that."

"And on Wednesday, all that Goldie has to buy is a nickel loaf of bread, maybe a dime's worth of ham. With the milk and the fruit—"

"You said that's what she does if the man is local. What if he's out-of-town?"

"Oh, that's really intricate," Aunt Lottie laughed. "*Then* she suggests that they take a club-house or a steak sandwich home to her mother."

"But she hasn't got a mother."

"Lil, don't be so—. Can't you see? They're for her, for Goldie, the next day."

"But don't the men ever find out there isn't a mother?"

"That's the sweetest part of the deal. Living in the hotel, the way she does, she always tells the gentlemen-friends that the management is strict, that she has to say good night to them in the lobby."

Mother didn't say anything, and Aunt Lottie told her not to look so disapproving.

"Listen, Lil, women alone—working for small wages, trying to support someone else—they've got to work dodges like that to get by."

"I'd never have the nerve, Lottie."

"Well, I guess I wouldn't, either, Lil. Furthermore, I don't think either of us is smart enough. I expect we'd get our dates and stories all mixed up; forget whether we needed the milk for our dawg or our cat. Goldie's efficient. Oh, I forgot to tell you her favorite spiel."

"Spiel?"

"Speech. She's always telling her gentlemen-friends that she's not going to let them spend a lot of money on her. She's always after them to save their money. Like last night. About all of us coming home on the street-car."

Mother seemed puzzled.

"Look, Lil. She brings the guy out here. Gawd knows what she told him. Probably, 'Oh, you must meet these friends of mine. We'll just stay a minute. I want to wish them a happy New-Year.' The Crowd is here; a little poker game gets started; the guy likes to play cards. Being a gentlemen, he stakes Goldie; and he's having fun, so everything's fine and dandy.

"But pretty soon he gets hungry. After all, he hasn't had any dinner yet. Goldie starts talking about how good cracked crabs and beer are. 'I know,' she says, 'let's send out for some.' But instead of all of us chipping in as usual, Goldie says, 'No. This is *my* treat. I insist. Mac—or Henry'—what was his name, Lil?"

"I forget."

"All right, we'll call him Henry. 'Henry,' she says, 'call a cab. You and I will go right down to Fisherman's Wharf and get some wonderful cracked crabs for all these nice people.' Well, what can poor Henry do?"

Aunt Lottie didn't wait for an answer. "He goes," she contin-

ued. "And on the way back they've got to stop at the delicatessen for the Louis dressing for the crabs, don't they? While they're there, won't garlic French bread go swell? Her friend Lil makes the best hot garlic French bread. They'd better get butter, too, some of those pickles, maybe a wedge of cheese—

"Then, naturally, they've got to get beer. She has the cab stop at Minelli's. Well, we all eat, Goldie plays hostess, does a lot of talking about *her* party, so we can get the drift, see?

"The guy is still good-natured. The food is good—the whole thing hasn't cost him too much. Just before midnight we've all got to go down to Market Street to see the New-Year in, don't we?"

"Sure."

"'Henry,' says Goldie, 'Henry, call three cabs.'

"All right. We all ride down, then we get out and walk up and down Market Street and throw confetti and blow horns and have a lot of fun. And then here's where Goldie's smartness comes in.

"'Henry,' she says, 'Henry, you've just been paying for everything all night long. You're a swell guy and a wonderful sport, but enough is enough. I'm going to make you save your money.'

"So Goldie gets us all together and hikes us up to Oak Street and makes us take the street-car back here. Well, that's half the fun of New-Year's Eve—coming home on the street-car, everybody singing the old songs, even the conductor joining in—and you couldn't get a cab at that hour, anyway; not for love nor money. But the guy doesn't know that. He pays the street-car fare, it's less than a dollar. And he says to himself, 'That Goldie Donovan, bless her heart, trying to save me money. . . .'"

Then Aunt Lottie noticed Allie, and she said, "That child!"

"You're always listening," Mother complained. "You're always around when people are talking privately."

"Eavesdropping," Aunt Lottie said. "And it's not nice."

"But if we need you for something," Mother went on, "you're blocks away. Allie, you were sent to the store half an hour ago."

"I'm just going, Mother."

Mother sighed. "I suppose you've even forgotten what you were supposed to get."

"Bread?" Allie hazarded. "Soap? Starch?"

"Allie! I told you three times. Nutmeg—the kind you grate, and a small package of baking-soda. I'm waiting for them. I want to bake my spice cake. If just once, you would listen to the things you are supposed to listen to. . . ."

Allie strapped on one skate. (Aunt Lottie and Mother had hidden the other one. She hadn't been able to find where, yet.) She didn't mind leaving. The story had been almost finished, anyhow. Aunt Lottie could sure tell stories. . . .

Eavesdropping? They called it that in books, too. And the good characters in the books (especially English novels) really carried on about how terrible, how awful it was to listen when the people talking didn't know that you were around. You were supposed to cough, to make some noise so that the speakers would know that you were there.

In Allie's opinion that was downright stupid. How could you tell but what the speakers might be on the verge of saying something marvelously illuminating? Something very secret or interesting? They might even be going to talk about you.

Allie tried a heel-and-toe going down the hill, but it didn't work at all with one skate; you couldn't balance. She hadn't investigated the gas-meter cubbyhole under the back stairs. Might Mother and Aunt Lottie have hidden her other skate there?

Eavesdropping. Grown-ups got funny ideas, sometimes, but this about not listening was the silliest.

Why, in war, it was glorious and brave to be a spy; to listen in on secrets. It was even courageous to pretend to be friendly with the enemy to find out everything.

"A spy," Allie whispered to herself. "I am a spy. They call me Mata Hari, but I'm really an American patriot."

With great caution she took off her skate, stuffed it under her arm to keep the wheels from making a sound. . . . She scuttled from telegraph pole to telegraph pole, peering out carefully before advancing on the grocery store.

Chapter Eleven

FEBRUARY twelfth started out like any other day. It started out better, really, because it was during first period at school that Allie got her wonderful idea on how to receive a lot of valentines.

The year before, she'd sent a valentine to every kid in the room, but she'd gotten only six in return. (All penny ones, too; not a single two-for-a-nickel one.) It had been awful, sitting at her desk waiting for her name to be called, while the girls around her giggled, and made frequent trips up to the teacher's desk to grab their many valentines. . . .

Allie thought her new idea was a brilliant one. She had thirty-seven cents. She would buy twenty-two penny ones, six two-for-a-nickel valentines—and send every one of them to herself.

She had it all figured out. She could put "From?" on some of them; scribble undecipherable signatures on the others. She would address a few to "Alice B."; a few to "A. Barton" or "Allie B."; she'd even put "Miss Barton" on some. Now surely she'd get at least six from the other kids—maybe more, if they remembered that she'd sent to them *last* Valentine's day. Twenty-two, and six, and six—maybe ten—she counted happily. Why say, her desk would be *heaped!*

In gratitude for her wonderful idea, she decided to send seven valentines to Beulah (who'd gotten just two last year) and only fifteen to herself.

All the way home Allie planned busily. Aunt Lottie had green ink, and Mr. Stimson had a bottle of purple ink in his room. (It would be such a foolish mistake to address the valentines all in the same color ink. She would disguise her handwriting, too.) Down in the basement, there was a dried up bottle of black India ink—she could spit in that, make it moist again—and she'd swipe one pen full of red ink from Miss Lawrence's desk. . . .

Allie was quiet, going into the house. After all, she'd have to sneak that purple ink— She was suddenly still, wary. She sensed, for the first time that she could remember, an atmosphere, a—something, that was strange, different. Carefully, she peeked around the door.

Mother was sitting in the kitchen, and she had her best suit and her best hat on. She'd taken her veil off, though, and she was folding it and folding it into little squares.

This was the first unusual thing, because Mother was so careful of her clothes. She took such good care of them—brushing them, wrapping them in tissue paper—that they lasted for years. Veils were never supposed to be crushed. Allie had heard Mother say so a dozen times. Now Mother would have to put the veil between layers of wax-paper, and smooth it all out with a hot iron. . . .

The second unusual thing was that Aunt Lottie was at home, too, instead of at work as she should have been. They didn't notice Allie. Aunt Lottie was talking. She stretched her hand across the table and put it on Mother's gloved one.

"Don't grieve, Lil," she begged, "don't grieve."

Mother pulled her hand away gently. "But I'm not grieving, Lottie. I couldn't—even if I wanted to. Too much water has gone under too many bridges. I'm sorry; I'm sorry as I can be. He loved life—"

"He wanted you, at the end. That's something, Lil."

"If I grieved," Mother went on as if she didn't hear Aunt Lottie, "if I grieved, it would be for the waste—the wicked

waste—of a life. A man who had everything, Lottie—brains, and education, and background—”

“Did he say anything? At the—last?”

Mother looked up. “Yes. And I think that’s why I feel so—well, so resigned, sort of. He wasn’t suffering any more. He—oh, Lottie, he thought he was nineteen again. He thought we were just starting out, and he talked about the wonderful things we were going to do—the wonderful life we would have together. He was young again—confident again. He was remembering the only happy time we ever knew. . . .”

Aunt Lottie was silent. Mother made one last meticulous fold in her veil, looked up then, and saw Allie.

“Allie,” she said gently, “Harry—your father—”

“I know, Mother.” She was embarrassed when Mother held out her arms to her. She shook her head.

“What do you want, kid?” Aunt Lottie’s voice was kind.

“My skates.” Alice asked, “Please may I have both my skates?”

That night, Allie lay in her bed and watched the moonlight. She had the window-shade clear to the top, and the whole room was bright. She had heard that one could get moonstruck—lying directly in the moonlight—and she was trying it out.

Aunt Lottie had told Mother that everyone knew that children were heartless. “They’re like little savages, Lil.”

“But Allie always seemed so fond of her father. I cannot understand—”

“Kids don’t realize. With them, it’s out of sight, out of mind. Remember that she hasn’t seen Harry for months.”

“But to ask for her skates,” Mother worried, “at a time like that!”

Allie raised her head from the pillow to listen. Someone had come into the kitchen, she could hear voices.

“Drue?” she called softly. “Is that Drue?”

It was Drue, and as she came up to Allie’s bed, Allie could feel the sting of tears against her eyes. Funny. All day she had

tried to cry because of Father, and she couldn't. Now—if she blinked—she would cry.

Drue sat down quietly, not touching her.

"Did—didn't Father say anything about me, Drue? Didn't he leave me some message?"

"Like what, Allie?"

"Oh—didn't he say that when I thought of him, or—went to places where we'd been together, to"—Allie stumbled over the words—"to remember him? Or—something?" She could hear her voice climbing. "Drue, didn't he want me to do *anything* for him?"

"Of course," Drue said evenly. "I didn't know what you meant at first, Allie. Certainly Harry left a message for you."

"Oh, please tell me."

"His very last thought was of you, Allie. 'Tell Allie,' he said—"

"But Father always called me Alice."

"That's right, he did say Alice. 'Tell Alice,' he said, 'that I want her to remember me as I was when—I was well.' That's why, Allie, he left instructions—directions—that you were not to attend the—funeral."

"I—I don't have to go?"

"No. He—he felt as I do about funerals being barbaric customs. And he—he wanted to be remembered by you in a—a different way."

"I'll remember him," Allie promised gratefully, "exactly as he was. I knew he wouldn't—go without leaving me some message."

Drue patted her shoulder almost pityingly. If Allie had known how, she would have reassured Drue. It was all right now. Really it was.

Drowsily, Allie heard Drue arguing with Aunt Lottie, but she didn't try to distinguish the words. She was walking down a street, a strange street (this was not exactly a Plak game that she was playing; this was just thinking) and as she walked

down this street, a tall, dark stranger passed her. He looked familiar—and yet, not familiar, because he was clean-shaven. His eyes lit up when he saw her, and he whispered, “Alice!”

“Father,” she whispered back, “Father.” And she could feel the warm tears running down her cheeks. “They told me you were—”

“I know.” Father smiled at her. “But really I just got tired and walked away. The hospital had to say *something*.”

“Of course, Father.”

“So that’s what really happened, Alice. We’ll have to keep it secret, of course. It would never do for anyone to find out. . . .”

“But where will you be, Father?”

“I’ll be around, Alice. I’ll stay as close as I can. You’ll see me—when you’re out skating, or walking. We might even get on the same street-car someday. Of course, I’ll not always be able to talk to you—”

“I understand, Father. But just to know that you’re near—”

“Exactly, Alice. I have to go now. I have to see a party—”

“Good-bye, Father. For a while—”

1920-1921

"Transfer here. . . ."

Chapter Twelve

IN THE weeks that followed, Allie learned that what grown-ups said about bad cycles was true. So many things happened to her (most of them her own fault, but that did not lessen the discomfort) that even Aunt Lottie said that Allie was the original hard-luck-kid herself.

First off, Allie was to blame for all of them almost going to jail. She'd neglected to take the gadget off the electric-meter, as she'd been told to do. If Aunt Lottie hadn't happened to look out the parlor window and see the P.G.&E. man coming up the hill to read the meter, they'd have all been in the soup.

As it was, Aunt Lottie had to ignore her varicose and run down the back stairs to yank the gadget off, while Mother rushed down the front stairs to delay the meter man. Mother kept asking him the time, until the poor man must have thought her quite silly.

Mother's scolding for this awful mistake had been half-hearted, not at all like the usual what-for. It worried Allie. Mother was too gentle, too quiet these days. She almost *brooded* over Allie. Wouldn't it be terrible if Mother turned into one of those hovering parents like Aunt Maxine?

She should not have thought about Aunt Maxine.

"Thoughts are things," Aunt Lottie was always saying; and Allie guessed she was right. Because it was right after Allie thinking about her that Aunt Maxine discovered the jams and jellies.

"Maxine's on the telephone. For you," Aunt Lottie told Mother.

"Better hurry. It must be pret-ty important for that one to make a long-distance call."

Mother was gone a long time. When she came back into the kitchen, she sounded more like her old self than she had in weeks.

"Well, Alice Barton, and what have you got to say for yourself *this* time? Ruining, yes *ruining* jellies; wasting good food. Doing a downright naughty thing like that to Aunt Maxine, who was kind enough to have you over for a nice visit. Well?"

"Aunt Maxine," Allie grumbled in a sing-song, "Aunt Maxine."

(Didn't grown-ups ever forgive or forget? She, Allie, had completely forgotten. . . .)

"Answer me, young lady. And none of your impudence. I want a full explanation. What gets *into* you? Why do you *do* these things?"

Allie shrugged, and that made Mother angrier.

"I'm getting sick and tired of hearing Maxine tell me how naughty you are, how wild, that I'm not raising you properly."

Allie thought desperately. Now, let's see . . . now, let's see. . . . It would have to be a fairly good excuse. . . .

"Well . . . you see . . . I bumped against her old jelly cupboard, Mother, and a lot of the old jars tumbled over. . . ." Allie started slowly. Surely she'd think of *something*? She always did. . . .

Mother had folded her arms and was looking Allie straight in the eye. "Go on. *And*?"

Allie was just a little frightened. Mother *did* look cross.

She heard her voice getting shaky. "And—and then, Mother, I—I did try to straighten them—"

She felt a sudden surge of confidence, made her voice tremble even more. "I meant to make Full Confession to Aunt Maxine, really I did. But she's—she's so awfully stern. I was scared, Mother. I'm so *scared* of Aunt Maxine."

"Scared?" Aunt Lottie questioned. "*You* are scared of something?"

"Well, Aunt Maxine isn't good-natured like you, Aunt Lottie. Or like Mother. And besides—" (Allie could tell *this* much) "besides, she's always saying there's never been a divorce or an operation in *her* family."

"Indeed," Mother said, "indeed. Well, there's never been a divorce or operation in *ours*, either."

"Even Sonny and Lenore," Allie pointed out, "are scared of Aunt Maxine."

"She *is* a Tartar," Aunt Lottie admitted.

"That isn't the point, Lottie," Mother said. "Allie was naughty, very naughty. I couldn't get everything that Maxine said—she talks so loud and fast—but she seemed to think that Allie ruined her preserves deliberately—on *purpose*."

"Now why would Allie do that?" Aunt Lottie asked reasonably. "So Maxine loses a few of her precious jars. So accidents happen. How do we know Maxine simply did not use enough sugar—she *is* stingy—and now she's blaming the spoiling on Allie?"

"But where," Mother wanted to know, "does the hat-pin come in?"

Aunt Lottie laughed. "Maxine probably said she'd like to stick Allie with it."

Mother looked unconvinced, but all that happened was that Allie had to write the usual "I'm-sorry-please-forgive-me" letter to Aunt Maxine. She did it in her very best penmanship. And thought how careless it had been of her to leave the hat-pin in the jam cupboard. . . .

For a long time now, Mr. Pegley's old room and the hall bedroom had been vacant. Allie knew that Mother and Aunt Lottie were worried about not being able to rent them.

Late one Friday, as she sidled into the kitchen, Allie heard the

news that the rooms had been rented that day. Three new boarders (well, two, really; Mr. and Mrs. Biskell would pay, but Minnie would work for her room and board) would be arriving soon.

Now who, Allie wondered, was Minnie? Who was Mr. Clyde Biskell? Who was Mrs. Vivian Biskell?

She knew better than to ask. Asking questions would call attention to her lateness. It would also call attention to the fact that she had, for the moment, nothing to do; Mother or Aunt Lottie would immediately think up a task or an errand for her. So Allie made her entrance as unobtrusive as possible, perched herself on an out-of-the-way chair, and listened.

Aunt Lottie was taking most of the credit for the new boarders. And Mother was being generous about giving it. Minnie and Vivian, it developed, were Aunt Lottie's second cousins, once removed.

"Poor Minnie," was the way Aunt Lottie spoke of her.

"Poor thing," Mother echoed. "Those teeth. . . ."

"They've always stuck out like that," Lottie said. "When Minnie was young, she was always going to get them straightened. Now she says that as soon as she can save enough money she's going to get the front ones pulled; get a pretty bridge put in."

"Seems wicked to pull out perfectly good teeth, even though they stick out so." Mother shook her head. "You know, outside of that she's not a bad looking little thing."

"Well . . ." Aunt Lottie was judicious. "Well, even without the buck-teeth, she's still rabbitty-looking. So timid."

"Lottie, is poor Minnie much older than her sister?" Mother asked.

Lottie figured. "Only three years older than Vivian. Gawd. She looks ten, doesn't she, Lil? The old, old story: one pretty sister, one homely one."

"They seem to get along well, though."

"Yes, they're awful close. Well, Vivian's always been delicate—her heart. And then all those misses she's had—I guess poor Minnie's used to taking care of her."

"Doesn't *he*—Mr. Biskell—mind? Having Minnie around all the time? She spoke as if she's always been with them. I mean—well, a married couple would like to be alone, you'd think."

"Clyde? Oh, no. He's grateful as can be to Minnie. He's awfully good to her."

"Well, he should be. I know I'm not very good at figures, Lottie, but it seems to me that Clyde Biskell is getting the best of the bargain. Look. Minnie works for her room and board, *and* takes care of Vivian. Whatever sewing Minnie does for us is to come off the Biskells' board bill. And—now I'm getting all mixed up. Where does her furniture come in?"

"Minnie lets us use her leather chairs and the piano in the parlor; she furnishes the extra bed, mattress, and springs for the Biskells' room—and we take three dollars a month off Clyde's bill for *that*. . . . And Minnie works for us for her own board and room, and gets the hall bedroom. Now do you see, Lil?"

Mother shook her head. "I think we're getting the best of a bargain, too."

"Listen, Lil, poor Minnie offered the terms, I didn't. Clyde doesn't make much, and if she wants to help. . . ."

Mother started peeling potatoes. "And it isn't as if we were paying out anything. It all comes off the board. . . ."

Once again Aunt Lottie tried to explain to Mother that anything coming off a board bill was the same as money, but Mother could never understand.

"That Clyde Biskell," she changed the subject neatly, "he's a fine figure of a man. Pleasant, too."

"The personality kid himself, Lil. Odd that he's never made more of a success of himself. He's been clerking in men's clothing stores for as long as I've known him."

"With Minnie to help here at the house and to keep an eye

on Allie," Mother planned busily, "I'll be able to get in half-days at the Bon Ton during Easter rush. That extra money, just now, would certainly come in handy."

Poor Minnie was the first of the new boarders that Allie met, and she wasn't nearly as homely as Allie had expected. Poor Minnie was like a bird, a nice, brown, little bird. Her eyes were brown and shiny; her hair was brown, too, and there was a great deal of it. When Allie admired it, Minnie blushed and said that her hair was very long—so long, in fact, that when she took it down to brush it, she could sit on it. Allie was interested. Now she knew someone who could actually sit on her hair, like the ladies pictured in the newspapers who recommended the Sutherland Sisters' hair tonic.

Poor Minnie fluttered, too, like a bird. She had a way of holding her hands up to her neck, her elbows held tightly to her sides, that made her arms look like wings. And her pretty, slender hands were always flying up to her mouth when she talked, or smiled.

Minnie's sister Vivian—Mrs. Biskell—was like a large, beautiful child. She had the curls, the slightly bulging forehead, the tiny nose and pouty lips of a little girl.

Mrs. Biskell had to stay in bed all the time, resting, and she breathed with tiny, rapid breaths. Mrs. Biskell liked everything very quiet. She liked the shades half-way down to darken the room. And no, she didn't particularly like being read to, except by Mr. Biskell. Allie was a thoughtful little girl to offer, but Mrs. Biskell's doctor had said the fewer visitors, the better.

When dinner was over, Allie postponed doing her homework, and hung around to catch a glimpse of Mr. Biskell. He was going to be late, because he was bringing over the things the moving men hadn't been trusted with.

When the doorbell rang, Minnie went to answer it, and brought Mr. Biskell right into the dining-room to meet the others.

Mr. Biskell *was* handsome. Mother had been right; he was a fine figure of a man. He was tall; he had red cheeks, and a wonderful head of curly gray hair worn in a pompadour. He was dressed very stylishly, too. And he was certainly a friendly one. Too friendly? Allie wondered.

"My dear Mrs. Barton," he was shaking Mother's hand warmly, "the time I've had, moving our humble Lares and Penates. But all through this dreadful day, the thought of you and your gracious house has been shining like a beacon."

Mother blushed, tried to pull her hand away. "We're very glad to have you, Mr. Biskell, I'm sure."

"A Lady Bountiful, that's what you are. Taking in the wandering minstrel and his charges. A beautiful Lady Bountiful, may I add? But ah, I expect you've been told that so many times. . . ."

Well, for goodness' sake, Mother was almost *giggling*.

"A rose that blushes unseen," Mr. Biskell went on. "Mrs. Barton, I am not much of a hand for compliments, but may I say that you should be gracing the boards?" He snapped his fingers. "I've got it! Who you made me think of. Lillian Russell! In, of course, dear Lillian's heyday." He smiled teasingly. "Lillian wouldn't have welcomed you though, dear Mrs. Barton. Lillian would have taken one look at you—and realized the handwriting on the wall."

Why, Mr. Biskell talked as if he and the famous Miss Russell had been great friends! Now he was greeting the other boarders, shaking their hands, speaking unhurriedly to each one. Allie leaned against the doorjamb, and watched. This was almost as good as a stage play, with Mr. Biskell the great star.

"Mr. Stimson," he was acknowledging an introduction, "the name *is* Stimson? A pleasure to meet you, I'm sure. Mine is Biskell. Accent on the last syllable. Bis-kell'.

"Mr. Webster? I am happy to make your acquaintance."

Mr. Webster neighed something back at him, and Mr. Biskell

(Bis-kell') listened politely, inclined his head, then moved on to shake Mr. Grant's hand, and to call him "sir." You could see that Mr. Grant liked being called "sir."

"And how," Mr. Biskell asked Minnie, "how did our darling Vivian stand the move?"

Minnie reassured him, and Mr. Biskell sat down beside her, patted her shoulder fondly.

"My right-hand-bower," he told them all. "This little sister-in-law of mine. I'd be lost without her."

Poor Minnie's hands fluttered to her mouth, but her eyes were shining. Aunt Lottie looked proud, too. She stood to one side and nodded her head from time to time; as if she were to be complimented, too, on this fine, upstanding gentleman who was, after all, related to her by marriage.

Allie watched warily. He was certainly a talker, that Mr. Biskell. It was a little silly, the way the grown-ups were falling all over themselves being nice to him. She, Allie, would certainly have to know him a lot better before *she*—

"And this is my little girl, Alite," Mother said, and beckoned to Allie. "Come in and meet Mr. Biskell."

Mr. Biskell bounded to his feet, and Allie was momentarily disconcerted. Next to Father, Mr. Biskell was the very first gentleman who had ever stood up when she entered a room.

He shook hands and smiled widely at her. Then he reared his head back and look pleasantly startled.

"Those eyes!" he marveled. "Will you just *look* at this child's eyes!"

Everyone looked, and Allie wondered if her face was dirty.

"Blue!" Mr. Biskell declared, "the bluest eyes I've ever seen. And wonderfully shaped. Why, they're almost blue-black. They are beautiful!"

Allie's throat got warm. Why, she didn't know her eyes had gotten beautiful. They'd probably been changing for days, and she hadn't noticed. First chance, she'd look in the mirror. She

held her eyes open very wide. She must remember to do that all the time, now, so that other people could notice how large, how blue-black, how wonderfully shaped—

“Allie,” Mother said crossly, “stop bulging your eyes out that way. It makes you look half-witted.”

Obediently, Allie stopped widening her eyes. Instead, she blinked them, slowly, languorously. Oh, wasn’t Mr. Biskell the *niciest* man?

Chapter Thirteen

THE WORK around the house was much easier, now that Minnie was there to help. A hundred times a day she flew up and down the stairs, never complaining, never considering anything too much trouble.

In the early morning, as soon as she heard Mr. Biskell go to shave, Minnie rushed into the Biskells' bedroom and bathed Vivian's face and hands, brought her her tooth-brush and her boudoir cap. Then she freshened Vivian's bed, plumped and piled up the pillows, and sprinkled eau de Cologne around.

Mr. Biskell took a great deal of time shaving and bathing. He believed in bathing every single day, which worried Mother. After all, she told Aunt Lottie, the gas-meter had no gadget on it; they had to pay for every speck of gas used, and it was expensive. She didn't dare to think what all that bath-water must be doing to the water bill.

Aunt Lottie said that she, for one, liked seeing a gentleman keep himself so neat and immaculate. Imagine, Clyde changed his linens *every* day.

Yes, Mother said, but poor Minnie had to do the laundering of them.

After Mr. Biskell went off to work, Minnie fixed Vivian's breakfast and took it up to her. Minnie stayed upstairs then, making the beds, sweeping, dusting; leaving the doors open so she could visit with Vivian. Then, after she had bathed her sister and washed out a few things, it was time to take over

downstairs, and plan what might tempt Vivian's appetite at lunch.

"Poor Minnie works like a dawg," Aunt Lottie said. "I always thought you were the fastest worker I'd ever seen, Lil, but she beats you."

"I know," Mother worried. "And I try so hard to spare her—to get her to take some time for herself. I feel guilty, seeing her work so hard."

"Well, I have a feeling it won't be for much longer," Aunt Lottie said meaningly. "Vivian doesn't look good to me. The way she breathes—the way her lips are always turning blue. . . ."

Mr. Webster thought poor Minnie worked too hard, too. He took to coming out to the kitchen, after dinner, to tell her so. He'd stand in the doorway, shyly, and his feet would shuffle and paw at the linoleum. He'd talk just a minute or two, then give his nice horse-laugh and gallop away.

Minnie, Allie thought, was just about the sweetest, kindest person in the world. Minnie said that all the kind things one did in the world came back to one. The way wickedness was always punished.

And, in Allie's estimation, a man like Mr. Biskell was certainly fun to have around a house. How he loved good food! Mother said it was a joy to cook for someone so appreciative. Minnie said that if Clyde had been a rich man, he would have been a gourmet—which meant knowing all about fancy things to eat. Even now, when he certainly couldn't afford it, he was always bringing home imported cheeses, small bottles of special wine, French pastries from the Pig 'n' Whistle.

Dinner became the high spot of the day. Minnie, of course, ate in the kitchen with Allie. It was nice, though, the way Minnie fixed things for the two of them. She always put a clean dish-towel over the oilcloth, had Allie set regular places, while she warmed their dinner plates in the oven. It was much better than standing at the sink and picking and piecing at the food.

Minnie and Allie always left the swinging door open into the dining-room, so that they could hear Mr. Biskell's compliments on Mother's cooking, the amusing thing that had happened down at his work today, or his latest funny story.

That Mr. Biskell was a card, all right, the boarders said. As good as the Orpheum, any day.

"He is like an actor," Allie told Minnie.

"No wonder," Minnie said. "He used to be an actor. Part time, of course; he could never afford to give up his job and devote himself to acting entirely. But Clyde Biskell has been in three Shakespeare plays right here in San Francisco."

"He *has*? Oh, Minnie, *tell*."

"Well, he played Salario—that practically opens the *Merchant of Venice*. And he was the Soothsayer in *Julius Caesar*; and once—once, Allie, he understudied the Player King in *Hamlet*!"

Allie was overjoyed. An actor! A real live actor living right here in her house.

"He's wonderfully talented in dramatics," Minnie went on. "Why, Clyde used to give recitations before the biggest lodges in town. He never complains, but with any kind of a chance, Clyde Biskell could have gone a long, long way. Ask him, sometime, to tell you about when he was on the stage."

It wasn't hard to get Mr. Biskell to talk about his acting. Allie asked in front of the boarders, though, because Mr. Biskell seemed nicer, more agreeable, when other people were around. When you met him alone, on the stairs or in the halls, he seemed hurried and grumpy. He wasn't jolly at all. He didn't remark about your beautiful eyes or tell you what a fine girl you were, how he wished *he* had a little girl—had God seen fit to send him one.

"Ah, the Bard," Mr. Biskell answered her query. "The immortal. Yes, child, I have had the privilege of bringing Shakespeare to the people. . . ."

"Say it," Allie begged, "say the part. If you remember."

"If I remember!" He laughed indulgently.

Poor Minnie echoed the laugh. "If Clyde remembers! Why, Allie, Mr. Biskell has a remarkable memory. He remembers everything!"

"It's called being a quick study." Mr. Biskell looked modest. Then he said, suddenly, "I hear a tongue, shriller than all the music!" He was on his feet now, holding his coat up around his neck.

"Shakespeare," he explained. "And I'm Caesar now, of course, holding my toga about me. I'll give you his speech because it is the one before mine. Caesar: 'I hear a tongue, shriller than all the music! Speak! Caesar is turn'd to hear.'"

"Then *I* say—after a suitable silence for emphasis, of course—then I say: 'Beware the Ides of March!' Later on, after Cassius and Caesar speak, I say it again, tolling each word like a bell: 'Be-ware—the—Ides—of—March!'"

Allie shivered ecstatically. "Do more, do *all* the play."

Mr. Biskell laughed. "But I don't know all the play. I had enough to do, to do justice to my own small but important part."

He turned to Mr. Grant. "It is, of course, quite the most important speech in the first act. It sets the mood for the whole of the rest of the play."

Mr. Grant nodded wisely.

"I'll tell you what," Mr. Biskell continued. "Since our kiddie here seems disappointed that there's no more Shakespeare, I'll give you something of that other equally great poet, James Whitcomb Riley."

Mr. Biskell stood serenely, waiting for their murmurs of gratitude to subside. He smiled, a far-away, withdrawn smile. "'The Old Man and Jim,'" he announced, "by James Whitcomb Riley."

Oh, it was a wonderful Recitation. It told all about this young man going off to war, and his father always saying: "Well, good-by, Jim; take keer of yourse'f!"

Mr. Biskell paused after each "Well, good-by, Jim"—and

gulped. You could see his Adam's apple going up and down. Then he would add, faintly and heartbrokenly, "Take keer of yourse'f!" At the very last, when the boy was a hero and dying, the father said it again—and this time Mr. Biskell made the gulp a loud one, and made his voice just a whisper.

Poor Minnie and Aunt Lottie cried, and Mr. Stimson and Mr. Grant and Mr. Webster said Clyde Biskell belonged on the stage; with that voice, that's where he should be.

"No." Mr. Biskell sighed thoughtfully and sat down. "No, that's a game for younger, luckier men. My responsibilities. . . . No. My star is setting now. What I would like, someday—if my ship ever comes in—is a dramatic school. Where I could give all that I know to my pupils. Where I might pass on the torch to eager, younger hands. . . ."

Then Mr. Biskell thought of another Recitation they might like. Without urging, he stood up. In this piece he was a little boy—a scared little boy. And when he spoke about "Seein' Things at Night," he made his voice throaty and quavery, and his eyes rolled as if he were terribly frightened. Then, to make them all laugh, he did "Little Orphant Annie."

But that was the last evening, for a long time, that Mr. Biskell recited to them. Vivian—Mrs. Biskell—got steadily worse and had to be taken to the hospital. She lingered there for less than a week.

Mr. Biskell had poor Minnie sew black arm-bands on all his coats.

Chapter Fourteen

DEATHS, Aunt Lottie brooded, always came in threes. Always.

"Oh, Lottie," Mother begged, "don't talk like that."

"Well, you mark my words, Lil. We'll hear of one more death soon."

Allie tried to think of something to say, some way of changing the conversation. Mother looked so sad whenever death was mentioned. Even reading about it in the newspapers could make her cry. And she never said the word right out, starkly, the way Aunt Lottie did. Mother always said, "lost," or "passed on."

"Listen," Allie said, "listen. I found out something. Minnie's birthday is next Saturday."

"I'll bake her a cake," Mother said. "My three-layer gold cake with White Mountain icing."

"And we'll have a bottle of wine with dinner that night," Aunt Lottie said, "to celebrate." She looked at Mother, and added, quickly, "Just one bottle. It will have to be a *quiet* celebration."

Allie had a wonderful idea what to do for Minnie's birthday with the forty cents she'd saved. She kept it secret, though—just told Minnie to keep one hour free on Saturday afternoon for the surprise.

Aunt Lottie screamed with laughter when she heard what the surprise had been. She told the boarders about it at the table that night.

"The kid takes Minnie out to the Beach and treats her to two rides on the roller-coaster!"

"It was a lovely birthday present," Minnie said. "I'd never been on a roller-coaster before."

"But Minnie," Mr. Webster leaned across the table and whinnied gently, "weren't you frightened? All those turns . . . the steep slide down?"

"I was frightened at first. Then it got exciting."

"And then we walked along the esplanade," Allie supplied, "and Minnie treated to those square sugar-waffles, and we almost won a kewpie-doll on the Wheel of Chance."

Drue came by in time for a piece of the birthday cake, and she brought some flowered silk for an Easter dress for Allie.

"Blue," she said, "to play up her eyes. And it should be made up plain, Lil. Allie's not the ruffy type."

"Let me make it up," Minnie begged. "I saw the sweetest pattern in *Pictorial Review*."

Mother and Aunt Lottie and Drue looked at each other significantly and agreed, carefully, that Minnie should make the dress.

Why, Allie thought, they *planned* this. To take poor Minnie's mind off her sorrow. Allie felt proud of Mother and Aunt Lottie and Drue. Sometimes grown-ups were awfully nice and understanding.

And the next Saturday, Minnie became, unexpectedly, a heroine.

For a long time, Mother had suspected mice in the basement. She had put out traps, but had never caught anything, even though the cheese was always gone.

"It could be a rat," Aunt Lottie said. She borrowed a round, funny-looking wire trap from the store, and brought it home. She baited it, set it out. (But without, Allie thought privately, without any real expectation of catching anything.)

In the morning, when Aunt Lottie went down to put the

clothes to soak, her surprised screams brought Minnie and Mother and Allie running to the basement.

"Stop screaming," Mother said crossly. "It's just a rat, and it's in the trap. What did you expect to catch?"

"But it *glared* at me!" Aunt Lottie said hysterically, "and bared its teeth! Look, Lil. It keeps gnawing at the wire, throwing itself against—oh, I know it's going to escape! Kill it!"

Mother looked around, uneasily. "But how?" she asked. "None of the men are home . . . how? . . . Allie, stand back!"

"Plague," Lottie said suddenly. "I just remembered. Rats carry bubonic plague!"

Minnie gasped. The rat made renewed assault upon his prison.

"Run upstairs, Allie," Mother instructed. "Quickly! It looks as if he's going to get free. . . ."

"And he'll bite us all," Lottie moaned, "and we'll die of plague. . . ."

Minnie leaned over suddenly, grasped the handles of the cage, and set the cage into the bucket of rain water Aunt Lottie had been collecting for her hair.

"There," Minnie said weakly, "there. Now let's all go upstairs. The men, when they come home, can dispose of . . ."

Mother and Aunt Lottie looked at Minnie, and their faces looked as surprised as Allie had ever seen them.

"Minnie," Aunt Lottie gasped, "how could you *do* it?"

"I don't know," Minnie said honestly. "Unless it was what you said about bubonic plague." She shivered. "And it just had to be done. I thought of the rat getting loose . . . biting someone. . . ."

"Well," Mother said, "I think you were wonderfully brave, Minnie."

And even though Clyde Biskell said women were given to hysteria and silliness, and that there hadn't been a single case of plague since 1909, Minnie remained a heroine to Allie.

Then Mr. Biskell moved in with Mr. Grant, and this left the

front bedroom to be rented as a double. ("Doubles made the money," Aunt Lottie said.) And the Shannon boys became the newest boarders.

Allie could never understand why they were always called the Shannon "boys." They were grown men with gray in their hair. They were Irish, and Catholic, and shy; and they clerked in the Hibernia bank.

Aunt Lottie thought there was such a thing as carrying shyness too far. She said that the Shannon boys were *too* quiet and unassuming. She said she got a start of surprise whenever she came upon them suddenly—in the halls or on the stairs. It always took her several minutes to realize that they actually belonged in the house.

Mother said the Shannon boys must have had wonderful raising; they went to church every morning. And everyone in the house had to eat fish on Fridays, now. It was not only a mark of respect, Mother pointed out, but fish was always fresh on Fridays. And cheap.

Little by little, the house became more cheerful, more like it used to be. Poor Minnie's eyes stopped being red with weeping. She and Mr. Biskell stopped talking together in condolent whispers. And Mr. Biskell started bringing little treats to the house again: oyster-loaves, real Mexican enchiladas, and tamales. He even spoke of learning a new Recitation for the boarders.

Then the insurance man found poor Minnie and there was great excitement.

"No one deserves a little good luck more than you do, Minnie," Aunt Lottie said earnestly. "With that money you can do so many things."

"But it doesn't seem right," Minnie held the check as if she would never know what to do with it. "Poor Vivian—"

"What I can't understand," Mother said, "is how you forgot about the policy, Minnie."

"It was so long ago, Lil, that Papa took them out for us. Mine

was made out to Viv; hers to me. And they were paid-up policies; it wasn't as if we were reminded of them by having to pay premiums all the time."

"Well, it's wonderful, no matter how you look at it. And no one would be happier than Vivian to know that things were going to be a little easier for you. For once in your life."

"First thing, I'll have my teeth fixed. Then I'm going to—" Minnie stopped. "But I should talk to Clyde first, of course. In a way, this should be his check. Vivian was his wife."

"Now listen," Aunt Lottie scolded, "don't start talking like that. If Viv had wanted him to have it, she'd have made the policy over to him, wouldn't she? And since it was your father who paid—"

Poor Minnie was gentle, but stubborn. She would make no plans until she had talked to Clyde.

Aunt Lottie worried audibly. "Women are fools, Lil. What'll you bet that poor thing will hand over—"

"Lottie, have you noticed the way she looks at—?"

"At Clyde? Sure. Like a little dawg waiting to be noticed. Oh, Gawd, she's going to get hurt. A handsome guy like Clyde. . . ."

"I don't know, now, Lottie. Lots of handsome men marry homely women. The thing is, I don't believe Minnie realizes . . . that she's head over heels about him."

"Well, there's nothing we can do."

"He does seem awfully fond of Minnie, though. He's good to her."

"Well, who wouldn't be, after all she does for him? Haven't you noticed how Clyde is nice to everyone who likes him? But when they disapprove of him, or refuse to let that personality get to them—well, like Drue, for instance—he's vindictive as all get out. No, Lil, Clyde's got a mean streak in him. I've seen it."

But Allie couldn't see any mean streak. Why, no one could be nicer than Mr. Biskell was in the days that followed. With

Minnie's money, he was going to have, at last, his dramatic school. He was like a boy again, he said.

"Not many men get a second chance at their dreams." He put his arm around poor Minnie's shoulders. "But then, not many men have a right-hand-bower like I have. Someone who has faith in them, someone who is willing to help them."

No, Minnie told Aunt Lottie and Mother later, no, she wasn't going to bother with getting her teeth fixed right away. She'd be busy, helping Clyde get his dramatic school started. He was depending on her for help. In fact, she was going to look around for a just right location and interview superintendents of buildings, while Clyde finished out his two weeks at the clothing store. Clyde was very ethical about things like giving notice. . . .

"Clyde says"—Minnie's voice was low and happy—"Clyde says he has never noticed my teeth. He says that you don't like a person for outward things like that. He says I wouldn't be the same person to him if I looked—if I looked any different."

"Sure"—Aunt Lottie sounded spiteful—"and dental work is expensive. It would probably come to over a hundred dollars."

But no one could stay cross with Mr. Biskell for long. His disposition was so sunny; he was always so gay these days. Even Mother and Aunt Lottie took to looking for good locations for The Clyde Biskell School of the Drama.

One thing Mother and Aunt Lottie insisted upon—even though they would certainly miss her wonderful help: poor Minnie was to stop working for her room and board, and become a real boarder. They gave her a good rate on the room, on account of the furniture they were using; but she was to quiet down, now, and take a well-deserved rest.

Mr. Biskell thought that was a splendid idea. He wished *he'd* thought of it.

Of course, Mother had to give up her part-time job at the Bon Ton, but she said she'd be glad to stay home for a while. There was something to be said for being your own boss; for

not having to jump to your feet every time someone called, "Front, Mrs. Barton."

And then Mr. Biskell discovered that she, Allie, had Talent.

At first Allie was confused. Talent, to her, meant being able to play the piano. And when you played crossed-hands music without a single mistake (like her cousin Lenore) then people said you had talent.

Part of the confusion was due to guilt. Mr. Biskell had caught her reciting "The Old Man and Jim," out in the kitchen.

It was Drue who had put her up to it. Drue had been surprised that Mother and Aunt Lottie had never seen Allie do it before.

"It's the funniest thing you ever saw," she told them. "You'll scream. Go on, Allie, do it. Do Mr. Biskell doing the Recitation."

Allie had done it, exactly as Mr. Biskell did it—right to the gulp, but Drue was the only one who laughed. Aunt Lottie cried, as she always did, and Mother said it was a beautiful piece, simply beautiful.

"Talent," Mr. Biskell spoke from the doorway, "right in our very midst. But may I say, someday, that I was the one to discover it?" He walked across the kitchen, put his hands on Allie's shoulders.

"Talent," he said solemnly. "Talent's own child."

Mother looked surprised. She looked at Allie, then at Mr. Biskell. "Are you sure? I've never noticed—"

"Very sure," Mr. Biskell said firmly. "She shall be my first pupil. May I say—my *star* pupil?"

"But she's always mimicking," Mother pointed out fairly. "It's very nice of you, I'm sure, but the expense—the lessons—"

"My dear Mrs. Barton, how can you talk about money at a time like this? Surely you wouldn't stand in the way of—"

"How much?" Mother said. "How much will the lessons be?"

"You'd want private ones of course. You don't put a natural like your little girl with a group who lack the divine spark. I'd

want to give her the complete course. Deep-breathing, Stance, Rhythm, Gestures, and Facial Responses. . . .”

Mother remained practical. “How much?”

“I’d give you a special rate, Mrs. Barton, because of all your kindnesses to me and mine.”

“Rate,” Mother said, “rate.” And that reminded her of something. She nodded. “Allie’s lessons. Can we take them off your board bill?”

“Oh, Gawd,” Aunt Lottie said, “here we go again.”

It was Drue who cinched matters, however. She was laughing, and Mr. Biskell was frowning darkly at her.

“Lil”—Drue took a deep breath—“Lil, I think you should give Allie the lessons. Every youngster should be able to do one thing particularly well, and”—she put an arm around Allie and started giggling again—“and I think Allie will make a *wonderful* elocutionist!”

Chapter Fifteen

THE NEXT Saturday Minnie telephoned from downtown that she'd just found a large, wonderful loft—right off Market Street. A dancing teacher was in there already, but she was willing to rent half. Minnie thought it would be just the place for Clyde's school. Would either Lottie or Lillian come down and look?

Aunt Lottie's feet had hurt, so Mother had gone.

Now Allie sat in the kitchen with Aunt Lottie. They'd finished all the tasks Mother had set. The rice-pudding had gone into the oven in time; the vegetables were peeled.

Allie yawned, and wished there was something exciting to do. She didn't even have a good book to read. She'd had one—"Red Pottage," it had been called—but Mother had taken it away.

"Stop fidgeting," Aunt Lottie said. "You make me nervous."

"Nothing happens," Allie complained.

"I feel for you," Aunt Lottie said, without sympathy, "but I just can't reach you."

She was engrossed in the newspaper advertisements of new hats.

"Toque?" she asked Allie, and showed her the picture. "How do you think I'd look in a toque? I had a draped turban once; everyone said it was becoming. It had a sort of fringe effect down the side of the face. I don't know. . . . One thing I do know; women will never wear these new cloche hats."

Allie yawned again. "There's nothing to *do*."

"If you're so anxious to do something, there's your room. Last time I looked under your bed, there were three magazines, four apple cores, and the skins from at least two oranges. Not to mention dust mice."

Allie changed the subject. "Names," she said, "names are funny things, aren't they? Like yours. 'Lottie'—short for Charlotte. I think Charlotte is a beautiful name."

"I don't."

"Well, people never do think their own names are beautiful. There's a girl at school named Bernadine, and she doesn't. You know what? If your name was Carlotta, we could call you 'Carla.' That's pretty."

"It's Wop."

"It *is*? What is your very favorite name, Aunt Lottie?"

"I don't know. I've always been partial to the flower names. Rose, Daisy, Violet. . . ."

"Oh, Aunt Lottie! My very favorite one—and I think I'll name my little girl it—is Francesca. 'Francesca from San Francisco.' Don't you think that's beautiful?"

"No."

"You don't? Well, it's a lot better than *Alice*. I hate Alice." She made her voice twangy. "Alice, Alice, Alice, Alice. . . ."

"Allie, *stop*."

"But there's nothing you can *do* with the name of Alice. Outside of 'Allie.' 'Alicia' is no good. Or 'Alyse.' And I'm always worrying that one of the kids will think of 'Alley-cat.'"

"The things you think of," Aunt Lottie said.

"Now, why didn't Mother and Father think of 'Reed' for me? That would have been nice. 'Reed Barton, of Reedstown.' Where did they get Alice from? Who in the family was named *Alice*?"

"No one."

"You mean I've got a name like Alice, and it isn't even in the *family*?"

"You were named for rich old Mrs. Campbell, up in Reeds-

town. That's where your mother worked, when she first came to town."

"Worked? Mother was a . . . servant?"

"Of course not," Lottie answered indignantly. "In those days, all the valley girls worked in the summer, helping out. Your mother was going to school in Chico. Coming up to the mountains to work was like—well, like a vacation."

"So, Mother came up to Reedstown to work for Mrs. Campbell. . . ."

"They were the wealthiest family in town those days. And Mrs. Campbell had no young people of her own; she took a great shine to Lillian. She was so happy when your mother started going around with Harry Barton. Well, anyhow, she always said that if Lillian would name her first daughter after her—after Mrs. Campbell—she'd never be sorry."

Aunt Lottie laughed softly. "I've always thought it was—well, so exactly like Lillian. When you came along, years later, she forgot that the Campbells had lost all their mines, along with everyone else. She just named you Alice—your father had five fits about it, but Lil insisted—and I think Lil is still waiting for old Mrs. Campbell to come along and give you a lot of money."

Allie was cross. A fine thing. She wouldn't have minded a family name. Not if it were Anna, or Cecelia, or even Sophronia . . . or Mary. Like Grandmother's name. . . .

"Aunt Lottie, can I go out and see Grandma?"

"Now? It's late."

"It's just over in the Guerrero district. I've gone three times with Mother; I know exactly how to—"

"Kid, your grandma's pretty sick. I don't know that you should. Wait until your mother comes home, then ask her."

"But it will be too late then. Visiting hours may be over. And I won't be able to go until *next* Saturday. Look, I'll skate—"

"Oh, no, you won't. If you go, you'll darned well be properly dressed, like a little lady. Your new coat, *and* your hat.

You know how awful fussy your Grandma Barton is."

"Can I have a dime—for carfare?"

Aunt Lottie grumbled that she hadn't said Allie could *go*, yet; and perhaps it would be better to wait until Lil. . . .

Allie got the dime. With the fifteen cents she had already, she could buy something to take to Grandma. Maybe soap. Last time, Grandma had complained that her skin was so tender, she couldn't use the kind of soap the Golden Gate Convalescent home provided.

"Slick up," Aunt Lottie directed. Allie obeyed, put her coat and hat on and came back into the kitchen for inspection.

"All right. Now don't stay long. And if your grandma is . . . listen, you ask the nurse in charge if it is all right to visit. Sometimes your Grandma's mind—well, wanders. She's awful old, Allie. She might not—"

Allie was anxious to get started. "Oh, Grandma's always glad to see me. G'bye."

Allie let herself out the front door, walked down the front steps with a heavy tread, then waited. Sometimes the grown-ups came to the parlor window to watch her go down the hill; to make sure she wasn't skating. There was no sign, so she sneaked around to the meter cubby-hole, got out her skates, and carried them to the corner.

The lady at the Golden Gate Convalescent home was as "well-now-I-don't-know"-ish as Aunt Lottie had been.

So rushed, she said; she really didn't know *when* she'd had a day at the Golden Gate quite like this one. Well, Allie looked like a big, sensible girl. She could go up to her grandmother's room, and if Mrs. Barton recognized her, why, she could sit and visit. Quietly. But if—well, she was to use her own judgment; she looked like a big, sensible girl. . . .

"And tell your mother to call me. I'd have called her myself if I had the time. You tell her"—the nurse looked significantly

at Allie—"tell her I don't think she'll have to be paying for many more weeks."

"Paying? My mother? You must be mistaken. My grandmother has lots of money."

"Not any more. And I think it is fine, *fine* of your mother to keep her here. I know it's a sacrifice and a struggle. I did suggest—other things; there are cheaper places; but your mother wouldn't hear of them. She said the old lady had lived in style, she was going to—" The nurse coughed. "Run along upstairs and have your little visit. And mind you tell your mother what I said."

Allie set her skates in the corner. She walked up the old-fashioned center staircase, dragged her hand along the banister. The dark, swirly wood was so smooth to touch.

Grandma's room was a front one, and it got all of the late afternoon sun. Grandma was awake; she smiled as Allie tiptoed in.

"You look good, Grandma."

"Well," Grandma corrected. "'Good' means admirable."

"Well.' How—how are you?"

"Very resigned, Alice. Ready to go."

"Please. . . . Grandma, don't talk like that."

"Why not? People make too much of death. Even though you're just a little girl, Alice, you should be told that. It's a thought that should be spread—like the gospel, like the word of God."

Allie moved uncomfortably. "I brought you some soap. I got the smelliest kind the Haight Street drugstore had." She handed the package over. "They call it East Indian Bouquet. Just smell, Grandma."

"It is—strong, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," Allie agreed.

"Put it on the table, here. You're a good girl, Alice. Do you go to Sunday-school regularly?"

"Well, almost every Sunday."

Grandma closed her eyes. "Alice. I told your mother to tell you. I'm leaving you all my things that are left. My gold mesh bag, my garnets—no, I think I sold those the time your father was so ill—but the locket is there. And your grandfather's gold watch. It's a key-winder, and old fashioned; but it was made from the first gold he mined."

"Grandma, maybe you'd better not talk. Can I read to you? Your—your Bible?"

"No. In the locket, Alice, you'll find a lock of your father's hair. As a baby, he had such long, silken curls . . . golden. He was six years old before I could bear to have them cut."

"Do I—Grandma, do I look like my father when he was little—maybe?"

"Certainly not, Alice. Harry was a beautiful little boy."

Grandma opened her eyes. "And now he's gone. My boy is gone. I had to live long enough. . . . But it was God's will. I must not question."

(Death, Allie thought. Grandma could talk right out loud about death. Was it because she was religious? Was Grandma braver, stronger than other ladies? Or was it that death was different when it took babies and little children? Was it *then* that one could not bear to talk about it; the way it was with Mother? Oh, it was hard, coming into a family after a tragedy; never knowing, exactly, what had happened, because no one would talk about it. You learned to be so careful with words. You learned never to speak of anything that might remind. . . .)

"Lillian could never accept God's will," Grandma said suddenly. "But then, Lillian had to lose both of her children. . . ."

"Grandma—about my brothers. No one has ever told me."

"The first one," Grandma answered quietly, "young Harry, was given the wrong medicine. In those days, and in our small town, the doctor was the druggist, too. And Doctor Schuyler had been drinking that night. . . ."

Allie's eyes filled. Her poor, poor Mother . . . no wonder she . . .

"Afterwards, your grandfather ran the doctor out of Reedstown," Grandma said. "He had a terrible temper—Will Barton."

"And—my other brother? The one Mother calls the baby?"

"Diphtheria. Less than two months later. It was a heavy, heavy cross for Lillian to have to bear. . . ."

Grandma moved restlessly. "Do you notice a strong scent in here, Alice? Like incense. . . ."

"I—I'm afraid it's the soap, Grandma. It does stink."

"You mean, 'it has an odor.' I never cared for heavy scents."

"Is there any special smell—scent—that you do like? Then next time I come . . ."

"Lavender. I always loved lavender. I used to grow it in my garden in Reedstown. And I'd put sprigs of it in with my linens. All the ladies did. . . ."

"I'll exchange this for lavender, Grandma."

Allie wrapped the package with care, so that the clerk could see it had not been used. Even with the paper around it, the stink—the odor—remained strong.

"Your grandfather," Grandma said suddenly, "liked exotic scents."

"I—I don't know much about my grandfather, Grandma."

"Will Barton," Grandma's voice was suddenly strong, "Will Barton was the most violent and impatient man who ever lived. He was always fighting out against life, while I strove always for resignation. It was one of the things he hated me for . . . my acceptance. . . ."

Allie stood up. Shouldn't she go and get the nurse downstairs? Grandma was talking to Allie as if she were grown up.

"Fight back!" Will used to shout at me. 'Fight back!' But I never questioned God's chastisement. . . ."

Allie turned to tiptoe out, but stopped at Grandma's next words.

"Like the night Harry's and Lillian's last baby lay dying. . . . Will had heard that there was an old doctor in Oroville who saved diphtheria patients that other doctors had given up—

"Will hitched up the stage and drove it down to the valley. He must have driven like—like the devil himself. We never learned what means he used to induce, or bully, the doctor into coming back with him. It's quite possible Will used—force.

"Before it seemed humanly possible, Will was driving the stage down the hill into town—using no brakes, standing up, whipping, yelling at the horses. We could see the poor old doctor, sitting beside Will, holding on for dear life. . . .

"And then—when Will turned to lift the doctor down, the doctor collapsed into Will's arms, and died. Right there. And—oh, it was the most terrible, the most sacrilegious sight! Will Barton raged and cursed. And he held that poor dead man and shook him and shook him, as if he could bring him back to life—"

"Grandma! Listen, Grandma, I'm going to get the nurse."

"Alice?" Grandma turned her head. "Alice? I thought you were going to bring your Grandma some lavender-scented soap."

"I am, Grandma. Next time I come—"

"But I want it now." Grandma sighed heavily. "So fragrant, not too sweet. Yes. It seems that if I just had some lavender now—"

"All right. I'll get it right now, Grandma. I'll try to exchange the soap at the drugstore down at the corner. I'll be right back."

"I'll wait for you, Alice."

Allie turned to look back. "Grandma—"

"Hurry along, child. I promise you I'll wait. . . ."

Allie had never run so fast. Down the steps, out of the house, to the corner. . . .

Stubbornly, the clerk refused to understand.

"All I know is that you didn't buy this soap here. See that mark? Not ours."

"But you carry it. I see it in the show-case. So why can't I have this lavender kind in exchange?"

"I've told you. It's ten cents more. And why should we trust you for the dime? Go back to the store you patronize. Let them do the exchanging and the trusting."

"But there's no time! My grandmother—"

The clerk moved to the front of the store.

Allie started to wrap up her package. She looked at the lavender soap. She knew it would be stealing because of the extra ten cents. It might even be a Mortal Sin, because it would be done deliberately. It was all right to cheat big corporations—they had lots of money—but it was not all right to cheat small stores.

Allie looked at the clerk. He was ringing some money up on the cash register.

With a neatness that surprised herself, Allie slipped East Indian Bouquet out of its paper, wrapped Lynton's Lavender in its place.

Red with shame and fear, she turned and walked out of the store. It took a desperate effort not to run until she was out of the clerk's sight.

Her heart was still bumping painfully when she got back to the Golden Gate Convalescent home. The lady in charge was standing on the steps, holding Allie's skates in her hand. Silently she handed them to Allie.

"First," Allie said, "I've got to take this package up to my Grandma. She wants it. She's waiting—"

"No," the lady said. "Your grandmother is—gone."

Allie looked down at the package she was holding out. "But—but what shall I do with this?"

Suddenly everything was confused. And Allie had such strange, mixed-up feelings inside her. Sad ones; sorry ones. But, oh, angry ones too. . . .

"She promised," was all that she could think to say. "Grandma *promised* me she'd wait."

"Run along home, now, like a good little girl," the nurse advised. "I'll telephone to your mother."

Allie walked two blocks out of her way so she wouldn't have to pass the drugstore. The clerk might even have called the police. . . . She put the bar of Lynton's Lavender on a fire-plug. Maybe an old lady—an old lady who was partial to lavender—would find it.

Allie thought it was funny that she didn't feel like skating. She'd cut back to Valencia Street, catch a street-car there. She had no nickel, but she wasn't worried. She had discovered that when you had your skates with you, you always succeeded in riding free. It was only when you were desperate, or without other means, that you failed.

Allie wished her nose would stop running. She rubbed it harshly with the back of her hand.

She thought of the violent, turbulent man who had been her grandfather. . . .

She thought of her name, Alice, that wasn't a family name at all. She had always thought it must be. . . .

It would have been nice to have had long, golden curls. . . . To have looked like someone. . . . To have *been* like someone. . . .

Allie sighed, and gave up. There was simply no place in the family for her.

Valencia Street. She leaned against the telephone pole, and sniffled crossly. Why *couldn't* she remember to carry a handkerchief?

A lady, evidently waiting for the street-car too, stared at Allie. And all of Allie's strange feelings merged together against such inquisitiveness.

"See anything *green*?" Allie asked.

"Dirty," the lady swung her shoulders primly. "Your face is very dirty, little girl. It's *streaked* with black."

"Your face is dirty, too," Allie snapped.

The lady gasped. "Tough! You're a little toughie, that's what you are."

Allie looked at her, but she didn't really see her. She was back at the convalescent home, remembering her wicked, her impatient thought when the nurse had said that Grandma . . .

"Yes," she told the lady, "I'm tough. Like . . . like my grandfather was."

Chapter Sixteen

WITHIN a month, Mr. Biskell's school was well under way. Mr. Grant built a raised platform for him at one end of the loft—that was to give Mr. Biskell's pupils stage presence—and Minnie dyed and sewed the heavy curtains that would pull back and forth.

The sign, THE CLYDE BISKELL SCHOOL OF THE DRAMA, got painted on the window. Of course, it had to share the space with the other sign, THE HANNA HEMPSTEAD SCHOOL OF THE DANCE, but the window overlooked Market Street.

That was certainly something, Mr. Biskell complimented Minnie—her finding a loft right downtown. Even having to share it would probably work out advantageously. Some of Miss Hanna Hempstead's pupils would undoubtedly be interested in the companion art, Drama.

"In turn," Mr. Biskell said, "some of *my* pupils . . ." he looked at Allie speculatively.

"Better not," Lottie advised. "At least, not until Lil can figure out some way to take it off the board bill."

Mother laughed good-naturedly. She was sewing up the torn place on Allie's coat. Tonight, Allie was to give her first Recitation—she was to appear before the Woodmen of the World at their Family Night—and Mother was very proud.

Mr. Biskell had written to all the lodges, the church societies and the schools, that he had free Talent available for any and all events.

"Wonderful advertising," he told Mother and Aunt Lottie, "there are bound to be parents in these audiences who will want to give their children cultural advantages."

"It's like a recital," Minnie said. "The kind piano teachers give to show what their pupils have learned."

"Best of all," Mr. Biskell pointed out, "it gives my pupils experience before groups; gives them poise, confidence. Allie, you are sure you know your piece thoroughly?"

"Yes, sir."

"The deep breath, first. One foot in front of the other; hands clasped easily. If you get a lot of applause, do the short one about the doll for your encore. And Allie, *wait* for your laughs."

"I will, Mr. Biskell."

"I'll see you down at the Hall, of course." He looked at his watch. "Minnie, you're bringing Allie when you come?"

"Yes, Clyde."

"Then I'll go along now. I told the Jenkins youngster to come early, I want him to go over his dialect."

"Miss Hempstead's going early, too. She wants you to make sure about the placing of the piano, Clyde, for her pupils. Remember?"

"Why, so she does, Minnie. Good thing you—reminded me."

"Miss Hempstead and Clyde are giving a joint recital tonight," Minnie explained after Mr. Biskell left. "Kind of her, I'm sure. She—she's so helpful. And she does know about these things. . . ."

"The thing that worries me," Aunt Lottie brooded, "is what's going to happen if Allie forgets her piece?"

"She won't, Lottie. And Clyde will be there to prompt her."

"But Allie's never recited before an audience before."

"I'm not scared, Aunt Lottie. Really I'm not."

"Well, you should be, and that worries me. Listen, kid, last thing—before you go out in front of those people—you make sure that you're all together. No pins that might come undone,

no elastic that might unsnap. My poor cousin Charlie—”

Allie listened, dreamily, happily. Another of Aunt Lottie's stories. . . . Oh, this was fun, waiting to make an appearance. Exciting, too, having everyone proud of you, a little worried about you.

“Cousin Charlie,” Aunt Lottie went on, “was naturally timid, and if I do say it of one of my own family—backward. He was twenty years old before he finished school.

“Charlie, being the oldest pupil, got to make the welcoming speech on graduation night. My uncle got him a brand new suit, and Charlie got all dressed up. But what with the excitement and all—no one thought to give him a last look.

“Well, sir, Charlie stood up in front of all those people and he gave his speech. But the poor fellow had missed buttoning the top button on his trousers!”

Allie rocked with laughter. Even Minnie contributed a shocked giggle.

“It's no laughing matter,” Aunt Lottie scolded. “That experience made a nervous wreck out of Charlie; practically marked him for life. All the rest of his days, whenever anyone came near him, the poor man would run his hand down the front of his pants to make sure they were properly buttoned.”

Allie did get applause enough for an encore that night. Some of the Woodmen of the World and their wives came up to say how much they'd enjoyed her Recitation.

One other act got as much hand-clapping and comment as Allie's: that of the thin, dark boy who tap-danced. He looked about fourteen. He was Miss Hempstead's pupil and his name was Jerry Tutman. Allie watched him with sudden and professional jealousy.

When the entertainment was over, the Talent were invited into another lodge room for refreshments, and Allie saw to it

that she and Jerry Tutman sat next to each other. Since, she thought, they were practically the stars of the evening. . . .

"Were you scared?" The boy was friendly enough.

"Uh-uh."

"You didn't look scared. I heard Biskell say that this was your first time."

"Your dance," Allie said, "that fast part—is it awful hard?"

"Uh-uh. It just looks hard. Flash. You know."

Allie didn't know, but she tried to look as if she did. "Were you scared?"

Jerry licked his ice-cream spoon. "I never am. I'm used to audiences. I've been raised in the theater. My mother."

"You mean—your *mother's* in the theater?"

"Yes. In—a way. Why don't you take dancing lessons from How-Now?"

"How-Now?"

"Yes. I made it up. That's what I call her. Behind her back of course. Because she pronounces her name Hah-Nah. Sometimes I say the whole thing out: 'How now, brown cow.' See?"

Allie laughed appreciatively. "That's *good*. But why don't you take dramatics from Mr. Biskell?" (Desperately, she cast about for an adequate nickname for Mr. Biskell, but could not think of a funny enough one. Oh, she did want this clever boy to know that she, too, could make up comical things.)

"My mother," Jerry answered, "thinks Biskell is a ham. But I'll ask her again. If you'll ask your mother to let you take from How-Now."

"Oh, I *will*."

"When do you take your lesson from Biskell? You're private, aren't you?"

Allie assured him that she was, indeed, a private pupil. Her lesson was on Friday, after school. Jerry said he took his on Saturdays, just before How-Now's Adult Eurythmic Group. Funny he hadn't seen Allie before. He was always down at the

loft, practicing; he and his mother lived in a hotel, and the management complained when he tapped.

Minnie came for Allie, then, and the boy stood up when he said good-bye.

"Ask your mother," he reminded Allie. "Maybe we could work out some routines together."

Sometimes, Allie thought happily, sometimes days started perfect; stayed perfect and ended perfect. No wonder grown-ups made up songs about such days.

Mother, surprisingly enough, made no objection to Allie's taking dancing lessons.

"You'll probably be very good at it, if you take after me. When I was a girl, I was considered one of the best dancers in the county."

Minnie said she would make all of Allie's dancing costumes. "Pink tarlatan skirt," she promised, "made very full. And a spangled bodice."

Allie had never worked so hard at anything as she did at her dancing. How terrible if she had to tell Mother that once again she, Allie, had missed out on the good family traits.

"But you must have *some* rhythm in you," Hanna Hempstead scolded. "Try, Allie. Try."

Allie tried and tried.

"Swoop—glide—pat," Miss Hempstead chanted. "Swoop—glide—pat."

With Allie it came out slip—slide—clump; slip, slide, *clump*.

Miss Hempstead was in despair. "Maybe ballet will loosen you up. Have your mother get you ballet slippers; I'll put you to work on the bar."

Allie bent, strained, and postured at the bar.

Patently, Jerry tried to help her. Allie did better with him. She was less self-conscious; she almost got the first steps. In spite of the dancing lesson, Saturday became the best day of the week.

Because after her torture was over, she and Jerry stayed to watch Miss Hempstead's Adult Eurythmic class.

They were allowed to watch, on the provision that they would not giggle. Some afternoons they had to clutch each other's hands frantically to keep from laughing out loud. The ladies looked so funny. . . .

Miss How-Now Hempstead would stand in front of her class, chanting, "In-hale, Ex-hale"—pushing her be-frilled chest out—in; out—in. Miss Hempstead's shirt waists always had frills or laces on them; as if she were making up, in femininity, for the lower portion of her body. Her serge bloomers were short and skimpy; and they showed a lot of her black silk stockings. Miss Hempstead's legs had bulges in them.

(Poor Minnie said that she, for one, admired Miss Hempstead's modernness in dress. One must not judge, Minnie said. Just because something had been considered immodest when one was a girl. . . . And Miss Hempstead *was* daring. Look at the way she had gone right to a barber-shop and had her hair bobbed! Minnie wondered, often and wistfully, how *she* would look with bobbed hair.)

When the Eurythmic class was over, and the red-faced ladies had departed, Miss Hempstead made tea for herself and Mr. Biskell and carried it into his office. Allie and Jerry stayed on in the practice room, talking; she watched him make up steps, or he held the piece of paper that had her latest recitation on it, and prompted her if she forgot any of it.

Allie learned all about Jerry. His mother *was* on the stage. She was a chorus girl in the George Watkins company down at the Strand. Jerry told that rather defiantly, but Allie thought it was a wonderful thing to be a chorus girl.

"Well," Jerry said, "it's something to do until we can get back to New York."

Jerry had lived a fascinating life. He told Allie about what he called their "palmy days," when his mother had been something

called a "soubrette." He had even gone to a professional children's school. He had once had a part in a show right on Broadway!

"Small, of course," he said honestly. "There aren't many parts for kids my age. I'd rather dance, anyhow. I'm best at that. The way you're best in dramatics, Allie."

Allie thanked him profusely.

"And if I get all I can of dancing now, and keep practicing, I'll be ready for the big time earlier. See?"

Allie thought that was wonderful, knowing so exactly what you were going to be when you grew up. It was so comforting.

"Then, too," Jerry went on, "my mother's not so—Allie, can you keep a secret, a *real* secret?"

"Cross-my-heart-and-hope-to-die,"

"My mother"—he leaned over to whisper it—"my mother is forty-four years old!"

Allie didn't quite see that it mattered that Bobette Tutman was forty-four. Since she certainly didn't look it; she was so tiny and gay and quick-tempered. In fact, it seemed ridiculous to think of Bobette being that old, or a mother. Even Jerry always called her Bobette, never Mother.

"Well," Allie soothed Jerry, "my own mother is forty-six."

"Allie, don't you see? In the theater you don't *dare* be that old! How much longer do you think Bobette can get parts—even chorus girl parts in cheap road companies? I've got to get busy, grow up, take care of her."

"Oh." Allie saw. Of course he did. Nevertheless, she was secretly glad that *his* mother was almost as old as *her* mother. It gave them another bond in common. She spoke of it.

"It's funny, Jerry, the way we're alike—in some things. Both our mothers are—well, older than mothers usually are; we're both without—fathers; we're both—"

"Talented," Jerry supplied matter-of-factly.

Allie didn't answer. It always made her uncomfortable when Jerry said things like that. It sounded—conceited.

"I guess," Jerry said, "I guess that's why you and I are such good friends."

Allie drew a startled breath. She hadn't realized. She and Jerry *were* friends.

"You're practically my first friend," Jerry continued. "You are my first *best* friend."

Best friend. All by himself, Jerry had said that. For once, Allie had not been the one who had asked; the way she had asked Ernestine Trent; the way she had asked Cathy Simmons. . . .

Allie's face grew warm. It was probably warm from remembering the past rebuffs. Ernestine's nose wrinkling disdainfully, when Allie has asked; and Cathy saying, kindly enough: "But I've already *got* a best friend."

Now she, Allie Barton, had a best friend.

Chapter Seventeen

ALLIE had a best friend, and the weeks became filled with fun and excitement. Her dancing lessons finally had to be relinquished; sadly, but sensibly. Miss Hempstead said it would be downright dishonest to keep accepting Mother's dollar. There was, patently, no chance of Allie ever being able to do a scarf-dance, a tap routine (not even the easy drum-major one to *The Stars and Stripes Forever*) nor the elementary soft-shoe.

Allie didn't mind too much. She got Mr. Biskell to change her elocution lesson to Saturday morning, so she and Jerry saw just as much of each other as before. He finally got Bobette to let him take dramatics, and Jerry and Allie drove poor Mr. Biskell half-crazy, begging for a recitation that had two parts in it.

"There aren't any," he said. "Not for children. Good duologues, even for adults, are hard to find. You kids be satisfied with the things I give you."

"But we want to work together, Mr. Biskell."

"We want a routine," Jerry said, professionally. "We don't want solos."

Impatiently, Mr. Biskell took all the catalogues off his desk, piled them in Jerry's arms.

"All right, smarty. Take these out to the practice room and look them over. All the recitations and skits are listed and synopsized. If you find any that's suitable for you two—I'll eat it. Go on. Off with you."

Allie and Jerry sat on the drafty practice room floor and read every booklet; reading aloud to each other when they thought they'd discovered something. But the only suitable duologues turned out to be too long, or too demanding of costumes and lights.

"Old Biscuit must be right," Allie conceded. (*She* had thought of that nickname for Mr. Biskell, finally, and after much concentration.)

"Everything here is marked Ad., Ad." Jerry threw the last catalogue down. "Adults get the best of everything. This floor is hard." He winced, rolled over.

"Where are they? How-Now and Biscuit?"

"In the office," Jerry replied, "like always."

"I dare you," Allie said, "to get us the drapes he uses for the Posture and Gesture lessons."

"The velvet ones?"

"Yes. They'll make swell cushions."

Jerry grinned at her, and tiptoed over to the stage. He walked with exaggerated caution, and Allie giggled at his antics.

Jerry was a strange boy. He'd dare to get the drapes—she never would; they were practically sacred, *never* to be touched except in lessons—and yet, he wouldn't skate. He wouldn't even try to learn. He was very reasonable about it. He said he couldn't see why he should take a chance of breaking an arm or a leg.

"Afraid?" Allie had taunted.

"You bet I'm afraid," Jerry had replied. And Allie had been shocked. Boys weren't supposed to admit they were afraid of *anything*!

Jerry came back across the floor now, draped in half the black velvet, dragging the rest. He pretended to Stalk this time, and Allie registered Horror. He did Threat then, and she did Despair. He tried to do Pity, but he couldn't keep his face straight. They always giggled whenever they did Facial Responses.

"Some of the stuff Biscuit gives us seems awful silly to me."

"Sure. But he says we've got to get the fundamentals. Hey, Jerry, here's a catalogue we didn't see—oh, yes, we did." Disappointed, she threw it onto the others; took her share of the drapes and made a cushion.

"Wouldn't you think they'd have one routine in there for kids?" Jerry moved to get out of the sun by the windows.

Allie watched the dust motes climb and climb.

"Grown-ups," she answered. "You know how grown-ups are. Yet they're always writing *books* for kids." She sat up suddenly. "I just thought of something. You never hear of kids writing books for grown-ups, do you? I wonder why?"

"Because kids don't know how."

Allie lay back. "And by the time they do know how, they're grown-ups. And it's too late, then."

Jerry agreed, sleepily.

That was another bond between them, Allie thought. She and Jerry were in complete agreement about grown-ups. They discussed the subject often, and discovered many things. For instance, they had the same main hate; the way friends of your mothers were always kissing you.

"When they say hello," Jerry complained. "And when they say good-bye. And their faces are all powdery and perfumed."

"You just have to kiss women," Allie pointed out. "It's worse for a girl. Then you have to let the men kiss you. Maury, and Uncle Neal, and Uncle Bob—you know, the ones who come to the house—they're always grabbing me and kissing me. And their faces scratch." Allie shivered.

"Grantley," Jerry said dreamily, "Green, Georges, Gray. How would Gray be, Allie?"

For days, now, they had been trying to pick a suitable professional name for Jerry. Jerry had thought of one for Allie right off the bat. "Allison Reed. Of Reedstown." When Allie was famous, and the newspapers interviewed her, it would

sound fine to be able to say, "Yes. The name is Allison Reed. Of Reedstown."

Jerry's name was proving difficult. "Jerry" was all right. After all, that's about all you could do to "Jerome," but the last name. . . . They'd gotten as far as the G's.

"Graham. How's Graham, Allie?" He tried it out. "Jerry Graham. Jerry Graham."

"Sounds like graham crackers."

"Maybe when we get to the J's—Graham crackers? I know what you're going to have for dinner tonight, Allie. Fresh oysters. Live ones. Old Biscuit sent me down to Fisherman's wharf for them this morning. A whole sackful."

"I will not eat them raw," Allie said. "I'll get Minnie to make mine into stew. I'm crazy about oyster stew. . . ."

"Old Biscuit sure loves to eat, doesn't he?"

"You should *see* him. Jerry, are you hungry?"

"Of course."

"Got any money?"

"No. I've got a lot of punches left on the meal ticket, though. Do you want to go down to the Greek's?"

Allie shook her head. When Jerry had first produced the meal ticket Bobette gave him every week, Allie had thought it wonderful, and had gone to the little restaurant near his hotel and gorged happily. Until she found out that the meal ticket had to last Jerry all week. And if she ate it all up—

"How about," Allie said carefully, "how about our cowboy chaps money? Could we maybe borrow—"

"Allie! If we keep borrowing from that fund, we'll never get enough together to buy those chaps. Do you want to go on forever, reciting 'Lasca' in dresses? Do you think I like doing 'The Shooting of Dan McGrew' in knickerbockers? We've got to get those chaps."

"How much money have we?"

"Just the two dollars we got at Amateur Night at the Wig-

wam. Allie, sometimes I don't think you're serious enough—about your career, I mean.”

“I am too,” Allie said indignantly. “I’m just especially hungry today. I didn’t really mean. . . . Listen, I spend a lot of time thinking up ways to improve my recitations. Next time I do ‘Lasca’—and if it’s my turn to wear the chaps, and we’ve got them—I’m going to find a cap pistol somewhere. Then when I come to the part where I say, ‘Just as I found my six-shooter behind in my belt’—I’m going to take the pistol out and fire it.”

“Allie, you *can’t*.”

“Why not? It would certainly get the audience’s attention.”

“But it’s not *artistic*.”

“Oh.” She guessed Jerry was right. But just the same. . . . To take his mind off her momentary desertion of the altar of art, Allie told Jerry Aunt Lottie’s story about Goldie Donovan, and the way she got *her* eating expenses.

Jerry laughed. “Bobette and I do that all the time. She says she’s lost more gentlemen-friends through my big appetite. . . . She’s joking, of course. If there’s someone she’s really interested in, she leaves me at the hotel. Then I become her kid brother.”

He started piling up the catalogues. “Do you suppose the main library might have duologues?”

“Want to go over and see? We can walk it in no time. I’ll carry my skates. Jerry, did you know that that new sidewalk in front of the library is the absolutely smoothest in the city? It’s perfect for skating.”

Jerry wasn’t interested. As they clattered down the stairs and out into Sixth Street, Allie thought how wonderful Jerry was. Minnie thought Jerry was wonderful, too. Most of all, Minnie said, she admired Jerry’s self-confidence. It was such a splendid thing to have, self-confidence.

Yes, Allie thought, Jerry *was* wonderful. If he could *only* skate!

Chapter Eighteen

"MOVING pictures," Mr. Biskell strode up and down the dining-room, making wide and enthusiastic gestures. "The coming thing! With this tie-in, my school will be the only one of its kind in San Francisco, the only one that offers a complete course in moving picture technique."

"But these men—the ones who are furnishing the cameras, the lights, the director—won't they actually be your partners?" Aunt Lottie asked.

"Certainly not. The school will remain The Clyde Biskell School of the Drama. I must remember to get the sign-painter in tomorrow. Let's see . . . 'AND MOVING PICTURE,' I'll have him add. Or would 'AND MOTION PICTURE' be better?"

"These two Hollywood men share only in the students who take the moving picture course," Minnie answered Aunt Lottie. "Naturally, since they furnish the equipment. I guess they give the technique, too. I expect it's quite different."

"Nonsense," Mr. Biskell said crossly. "Acting's acting, isn't it? In fact, that's the main reason they are giving me first chance at this. Because they know I've got the thing they need: *technique*."

"I think . . ." Aunt Lottie said, "I think you should investigate a little further, Clyde. After all, if you're going to get your students to pay out a whopping big sum, in advance. . . ."

"Caution, caution!" Mr. Biskell said impatiently. "Where's

your pioneer spirit? Hanna Hempstead thinks it's a marvelous opportunity."

Minnie looked stricken. "I think it's a good opportunity, too, Clyde; really I do. I just think you ought to make sure—"

He smiled down at her. "I'm really doing it for your sake, Minnie. Not only to start repaying your original investment in my school—but to really make some money for us. The way things are—the money comes in so slowly; and, after all, I do have certain expenses. . . . But may I say, Minnie, that not for one minute have I forgotten . . . my little right-hand-bower?"

Mr. Biskell started walking back and forth again. "Classes at night; get more students that way . . . people who work during the day. We can advertise. . . .

He stopped to look at Allie, then at Mother.

"You're making a big mistake, Mrs. Barton, not letting Allie take this new course."

Mother shrugged expressively. "Fifty dollars. Down. Where am I going to get fifty dollars?"

"It has to be that way, the whole sum in advance. These fellows insist upon that." He shook his head. "It's a shame you can't figure some way to get Allie in. I could make another Madge Evans out of her. Or a Virginia Lee Corbin."

Allie thought it was a shame, too. It was terrible, being left out of something so thrilling. She was, however, an interested observer of all the exciting preparations. She hung around the loft, watched the camera get moved in; watched the testing of the lights. (They were called kliegs, and they were brighter than anything she'd ever seen.)

The two new men—the important looking one was Mr. Cratcher; the crabby one had just one name, Mick—worked together quickly and efficiently. They snapped odd directions to each other, stopped often to consult Mr. Biskell.

The hardest disappointment of all was the news that Jerry was going to get to enroll in the moving picture course.

"But I thought your mother—I thought Bobette—"

"She still thinks Biscuit is a ham." They stopped to giggle at the way that sounded, then Jerry got serious again. "But he convinced her that this was better than saving to get back to New York. We just had fifty dollars, anyhow. And Biskell does guarantee a job in Hollywood, you know, after the course is completed."

The classes got under way, and Allie refused to be excluded from the course completely; she insisted upon being a bystander. After all, she was Mr. Biskell's star elocution pupil, and Mr. Biskell lived at her house.

Mr. Cratcher and Mick weren't happy about her constant presence; they were always chasing her out of the way. Then Mother and Aunt Lottie took to fussing about Allie going downtown alone at night. At first, poor Minnie had escorted her. Then Minnie said that the school was not the same any more. It was so crowded with moving picture students; Clyde and Miss Hempstead were always busy. Minnie said she felt out of place there now. . . .

Allie didn't. Even though the familiar loft looked so glamorously different at night, Allie felt right at home. After all, a mere matter of fifty dollars was all that stood between these other more fortunate, but less talented students and Allie. Some day, of course, she'd find the fifty dollars (in the gutter, maybe; or get it as a reward for rescuing a rich child from in front of an automobile) and then she would catch right up with them; become a famous child movie-star. And all these grown-ups who yelled at her now, who pushed her out of the way, would say: "Why, I knew little Allison Reed when she was first starting her career in San Francisco. I remember how. . . ."

The klieg lights were kept burning. Mr. Cratcher said that gave atmosphere; kept the students on their toes. He said atmosphere was very, very important. In the saddest scenes, he had

Miss Hempstead play soft piano music. He had Mick put a table and some chairs in the center of the loft. That was scenery. Later on, when the students were further advanced, they'd have real scenery. Now, the main thing was pantomime, pantomime.

Mr. Cratcher was wonderful about thinking things up to pantomime.

"Tonight, we'll do . . ." he'd rub his bald head vigorously. "Clyde, come here. Tell me what you think about this little mood." He'd take Mr. Biskell's arm and walk him up and down, talking to him. "See what I want, Clyde?"

Mr. Biskell would nod seriously, then turn to the students.

"All right, people. This is what we want. The scene is a dance-hall. The heroine is seated at this table, greatly frightened. She's come here to help the hero get back his rightful inheritance.

"The villain comes in—all you fellows will get your chance to be heavies tonight, excellent practice—the villain sits down at the table, reaches across, grabs the heroine's arm, and demands the papers.

"She pleads that she hasn't got them; she pleads with the villain to let her go. He twists her arm. She cries. And listen, you young ladies. If you can cry real tears—there at the last of the scene—may I say you'll make Mr. Biskell very proud? Make up your own dialogue as you go along; it's not important.

"Ready? All right. I'll rehearse; then Mr. Cratcher will take over. Pair off. You two—there by the piano. I'll take you first."

Mr. Biskell would rehearse each couple, sometimes even act out the parts. He would stand in front of the self-conscious pair at the table and plead for more Threat, more Anguish. Mick and Mr. Cratcher would go out for a smoke, or lounge at the back of the loft and talk together until Mr. Biskell called them.

Then the whole loft became still; hushed with expectancy.

With great seriousness, Mr. Cratcher inspected the students' make-up, made quiet corrections. While Mick fussed with the

lights, Mr. Cratcher moved his chair to the side of the camera, called for the first couple.

"That's it, that's it," he'd say. "Miss—forgive me, I'm so bad at names—you, there, keep your face turned this way, chin up. That's it. All right. Lights! Action! Cam-er-a!"

Mick, his cap on backwards, crouched behind the camera and started turning the wheel on the side. The camera handle made a grinding sound; the lights buzzed; you could imagine yourself right in a real Hollywood studio.

Allie stepped carefully over all the wires, and stood in back of the camera; tried to imagine how this would look when she got to see it on the screen. Really, if it weren't so serious, she could have giggled. The people did look so funny—sitting there at the table, grimacing at each other.

"That's all. That finishes for tonight."

Mr. Cratcher stood up, turned off the brightest light. Mick stopped winding the camera. "You were all wonderful. Just wait until you see. . . ."

"When *are* we going to see ourselves, Mr. Cratcher?" One of the ladies was daring enough to ask.

"Well, I'll tell you, Miss—? Miss. Mick and I were keeping it for a surprise, but . . . How about it, Mick? Shall we tell them?"

Mick grunted.

"We're going to run all the reels," Mr. Cratcher said, "on New-Year's Eve, right here. We're getting a screen and a projector sent up, and each and every one of you can see yourselves. How will you like that?"

There were cries of gratification and excitement.

"And let me say this, ladies and gentlemen." Mr. Biskell sounded very proud. "Certain people of importance down in Hollywood are very, very interested in what's been discovered up here at our school."

More cries from the breathless students.

"Mr. Cratcher." It was Jerry. "Mr. Cratcher, you forgot me."
Mr. Cratcher looked at him absently. Mick started taking the camera apart.

"This—this is the third week you haven't taken me."

"But you have no partner, Jerry. And really, villain in a dance-hall is hardly your forte."

"It's experience," Jerry said stubbornly, "and—"

"Hey," Mick reminded crossly, "how about the night you were in every scene? Where you were the drummer boy delivering the papers to the Captain and his lady?"

"But my mother paid for this course for me, and I'm supposed to—"

"The boy's quite right," Mr. Cratcher said, "quite right. Mick, put the light back on."

Mick grumbled, but obeyed.

"Now let's see . . . will one of you young ladies. . . . No, you're too tall for Jerry. So are you. Here, little girl. You—back there by the window. . . ."

"Me?" Allie squeaked. "*Me?*"

"Come on up here and do a scene with Jerry, will you?"

"Oh, yes, sir, yes, sir." Allie fell over all the wires, getting to the table.

Mr. Biskell didn't tell Mr. Cratcher or Mick that she wasn't a moving-picture student. In fact, he didn't even rehearse her and Jerry; he just stayed by the piano talking to Miss Hempstead.

"Make-up," Allie said breathlessly. "I need make-up."

"Aw—" Mick said.

"Of course she must have make-up," Mr. Cratcher said. "Here, I'll do her."

Allie sat at the table in the flood of lights, waiting for Jerry to come on and threaten her. She remembered not to look directly at the camera. It was no trick at all to imagine oneself in a dance-hall; she could all but hear the music, the talk, and the laughter.

She put her hands up to her cheeks and made her eyes roll. (That showed Fear. Not one of the ladies had thought of that gesture.) She jumped slightly when Jerry slid into his chair and reached across the table for her arm. She made her breath come very fast. Slowly, carefully, she enunciated the words: "No! No!"

Allie lifted her chin, then, let the tears come into her eyes. She closed the eyes gently (remembering to keep her teeth clenched, however) so that the tears would come down her cheeks in great, pearly drops. . . .

"Cut!" Mr. Cratcher blew his nose loudly and coughed. "All right, kids." He raised his voice. "The rest of you, next Wednesday, eight o'clock. It's just weeks now until New-Year's. I want to see—I want you yourselves to see—great improvement by then. Goodnight."

Allie sat on at the table. She would never, never forget this night. The lights. The sound the camera made. The thrill. . . .

There was another night Allie knew she would never forget. The night Bobette Tutman came down to the loft and acted out a scene that put every student in the place to shame.

Bobette walked angrily right into the middle of the romantic hero-and-heroine-saying-farewell-in-a-garden scene.

"I took time out from my show to come down and talk to you." Bobette put her hands on her hips and glared at Mr. Cratcher.

"You, too!" She jerked her head at Mr. Biskell.

Allie was appalled. How *awful* for Jerry. To have one's mother come in and yell like this. . . .

"I've got a friend," Bobette said loudly, "and tonight he told me all about schemes and rackets like this one, and I—"

"Come into the office, Mrs. Tutman, I beg of you." Mr. Biskell's face looked as if it were portraying Anguish in Facial Responses.

"My dear Mrs.—" Mr. Cratcher soothed. "My dear Mrs. . . . Let's talk this over. You are the mother of that talented, talented—? I *am* so bad at names."

"The name is Tutman," Bobette snapped, "and it's one you're going to remember for a long, long time."

She pulled away from Mr. Cratcher and Mr. Biskell and marched towards the camera. Mick jumped in her way, but she gave him a sharp push. She reached out, wrenched the camera open, looked inside—then turned back.

"I knew it," she screamed, "I knew it. No film! I'll bet there never has been any film. You never had any intention of doing a thing but getting money out of us. You bunch of crooks! I'm going to put you three behind bars—where you belong. *Fifty* dollars. *In* advance. Fifty hard-earned dollars—shot to hell!"

Chapter Nineteen

LIFE, Mr. Biskell said bravely, had to go on. And he was certainly not going to start the New-Year by worrying.

Mr. Cratcher and Mick had gone back to Hollywood to pull some strings. They'd be back. Of course they'd be back. . . .

"That Bobette Tutman," Mr. Biskell said. "The little—I beg your pardon, ladies," he made a sweeping bow to Mother, Aunt Lottie, and Minnie, "but to have all one's plans and ambitions destroyed by a common little— No faith, that's what. No trust."

"And no film in the camera," Aunt Lottie reminded.

Mr. Biskell glared at her and stalked out of the kitchen.

"Lottie," Minnie said, "you shouldn't. Poor Clyde feels so bad."

"Well, why won't he admit that those guys were crooks? I think Clyde had a darned good suspicion all along—"

"Oh, no, Lottie."

"Oh, yes, Minnie. I think both he and Hanna Hempstead knew. I think they were both in it for exactly what they could get out of it."

"The thing I can't forgive," Mother said, "is Clyde Biskell trying to get fifty dollars out of me for Allie to take that course."

Aunt Lottie agreed. "Even trying to fleece his friends."

Poor Minnie looked ready to cry. "You're so wrong; really you are. You just wait and see. Clyde says every one of those students will be reimbursed."

"Oh, Gawd," Aunt Lottie said, "I'd forgotten. Minnie, what will all this do to the money *you* put in Clyde's school?"

"Why—nothing. Clyde's going to pay it back, every cent. The elocution part of the school is still going. They're allowing him to keep that. Until the hearing—if they decide to hold a hearing."

"Was it really Bobette Tutman who called in the authorities?"

"Yes. She got some of the other women to go down with her that night to swear out a complaint."

"Do you think they'll go ahead with it?"

"No, Lottie. Clyde and I think everything is going to come out all right. It will—blow over. If there was crookedness, it was those Los Angeles men's fault; not Clyde's. And Hanna Hempstead says that fortunately there was nothing in writing about promising the students either tests or jobs."

"But Clyde kept *saying* . . ."

"I—know. But if Bobette will withdraw her complaint, get the other women to, everything will turn out all right. I—" Minnie swallowed painfully—"I'm not worried. Really."

Mr. Biskell insisted that everything at the school go on as usual. The elocution lessons were to be continued. Allie and Jerry were to keep rehearsing. Had they forgotten that they were appearing in the B'nai B'rith benefit next month? Jerry needed to learn another short encore. . . .

In Allie's opinion, Mr. Biskell was acting very odd these days. He didn't spend nearly so much time in his office with Miss Hempstead; he kept coming out to the practice room and quoting Shakespeare.

"The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," he'd declaim, smile gallantly, then give Jerry a clap on the back.

"I can't understand old Biscuit," Jerry complained. "Wouldn't you think he'd hate me—for what Bobette did? But he's never been nicer."

It was true. Mr. Biskell even gave Jerry money for running

errands, which was unheard of. At first, Allie and Jerry shared the tips.

"How much did he give you today, Jerry? I hope a quarter. Then we can each have a soda. Or some Hoyt's doughnuts. Let's put just a nickel towards the chaps fund this time."

It was a quarter. But Jerry was—funny about it.

"Look, Allie, you have the soda. I want to save part of this for a cigar for Mr. Biskell."

"A cigar? For old Biscuit?"

"Yes. I'm going to buy him a ten cent one. And I don't think we should go on calling him Biscuit."

Allie was cross. "He's just being nice to you because he wants you to get your mother to—"

Jerry nodded. "I know that's—partly it. But he really does like me. He—he wants to see me become more serious about my dramatics. He says he'd even go on coaching me, *free*. Because—well, he says I've got the spark."

"Aw—he told my mother that about me, too."

Jerry went on as if he hadn't heard her. "And he's really an awful lonely sort of guy. . . ."

"He's got How-Now."

"No. He says he's lonely for—man-to-man companionship. He says he's always wanted a son. . . ."

Mr. Biskell discovered that Jerry had a natural flair for Shakespeare and lent him his own bound volume to study. Jerry got to pick out the parts he particularly liked, and Mr. Biskell recited them for him, so Jerry could hear how they sounded on the stage. Allie was excluded from these sessions. And she couldn't make up her mind which she disliked the more, Mr. Biskell or Mr. Shakespeare.

She moped around the loft, but Jerry had little time for her. She grew more and more indignant.

"Jerry Tutman," she said finally, "I'm surprised at you."

"What do you mean?"

Allie didn't know what she meant; she only knew that she missed Jerry; that she wanted things to be the way they had been. "Furthermore," she added, incoherently, "I'm surprised at Bobette. After what's happened—after her fight with Biscuit, letting you go on with your lessons."

"Why not? They're paid for. We always paid in advance. Why shouldn't I get what's coming to me? Besides, I think Bobette's going to withdraw her complaint; all she wants is her fifty dollars back. I've told her how swell Mr. Biskell is. . . ."

"Oh, go on and spend *all* your time with Biscuit," Allie said. "I should worry; I should care. *I* am getting a lot of skating practice in these days. I'm even going up to the rink, some afternoon. Today, maybe. Would—would you like to come with me?"

"Skating!" Jerry said. "Listen, Mr. Biskell is getting free passes to the Shakespeare Repertory next week, and he's going to take me to every performance."

"I bet he doesn't. I bet he takes How-Now. So there."

Allie lost her bet.

One Saturday morning, Allie waited outside Mr. Biskell's office for Jerry. She'd thought up a wonderful duologue for the two of them. Comical, too. Surely Jerry would be interested. . . .

Miss Hempstead passed Allie on her way out to lunch.

"Still sitting there, Allie?"

"I'm waiting for Jerry to finish his lesson."

"Oh. Well, tell Clyde—Mr. Biskell, that I'll be back in an hour. Mind, now."

"All right."

("Mind, now." How-Now, brown cow? "Mind, now." But it was no fun calling Miss Hempstead How-Now to yourself. It sounded silly, not funny.)

A man came up the stairs and looked into the anteroom. "Where can I find Mr. Biskell?" he asked.

Allie stood up. What a wonderful excuse to knock on the office door. "He's right in here. I'll get him for you." She knocked.

Mr. Biskell opened his door, but before Allie could explain, the man said loudly, "Clyde Biskell?"

"Yes."

"Here, then." He handed a paper to Biscuit. "And don't glare at me; all I do is serve 'em." The man left hurriedly.

Mr. Biskell stared down at the paper, then turned and walked into the office.

Allie followed him. "Jerry," she said, "Jerry, I've just thought up the funniest routine for us. We're at this rehearsal, see, and—"

"Here!" Mr. Biskell threw the paper over to Jerry. "See what your fine mother has done to me?"

Jerry caught the paper, looked at it. "I—I don't understand."

"You can read, can't you? It means that I've got to appear down at the district attorney's office. I thought you assured me that your mother wasn't going to—"

"She wasn't," Jerry interrupted anxiously. "Bobette said she'd be satisfied to get her money back. She—we need it, Mr. Biskell. There's a chance for her in a show back east. A friend can get her the part, like that—but we've got to get the fare. . . ."

"So, I was a little slow in getting her money for her. Couldn't she have trusted me? Couldn't one of you have had the decency to tell me about *that*?" He pointed to the paper Jerry was still holding. Then he stamped over to the window and looked out. Allie wondered what he could be staring at; there was nothing to see, that window was just an air-shaft.

Jerry put the paper down, followed him. "Mr. Biskell . . . I'm sorry, sir."

"Finished," Mr. Biskell said, "ruined." He turned around and demanded, "Well, what are you staying around for? Why don't

you go with Allie? With your little friend? She's waiting for you."

Jerry looked at Mr. Biskell wonderingly. "No, I'll stay with you."

Allie was uncomfortable. "Hey," she said, "what I wanted wasn't important . . . I'd better go. . . ."

"No. Wait, Allie." Mr. Biskell's face was all mottled and red. "Wait for clever Jerry, *talented* Jerry. . . ."

"Please, Mr. Biskell . . ." Jerry put his hand out tentatively. "You'll make yourself ill. . . ."

Mr. Biskell stared at the outstretched hand. All his terrible anger seemed to mount and explode in his shout. "*Talent?* You never had any, you never will have! You'll never be anything but a—a—chorus boy. That's what. A painted chorus boy!" Mr. Biskell's voice got louder. "That's the best you can hope for. And you'll—you'll probably grow up to be the kind of man . . . that decent men smash in the face! Like this!"

Viciously Mr. Biskell slapped Jerry.

Allie heard her own thin scream across the queer, sudden silence. "Don't! Oh, Mr. Biskell, don't hit him again!"

Mr. Biskell didn't bother to answer. With a last, vindictive look, he turned and walked out to the loft.

Jerry put two shaking hands up to his face.

"Damn him!" Allie was almost crying. "Do you want to hit him, Jerry? I'll help you. Or look . . . we can yell names back at him as we run down the stairs. Come *on*, Jerry."

"Go away, Allie."

"I won't. We're friends. We're supposed to stick together against grown-ups."

"Go away."

"But—we're best friends."

"Not any more. You don't understand. Just please—go away."

Allie stared at Jerry. She could see tears falling through the

hands that covered his face. And with the sadness, the sympathy she felt—there was a tinge of shame for Jerry. Boys were not supposed to cry.

Allie skated for hours. She skated so far, it was dusk by the time she got home. She knew she'd get scolded, but she didn't care. She would *welcome* what-for. She'd like the chance to sass someone; and good and hard, too. She wouldn't mind punishment.

Jerry. Old Biscuit. . . .

Maybe she didn't understand, but she knew *one* thing. Grown-ups could be evil . . . *evil*.

Minnie was in Allie's room.

"I—I hope you don't mind, Allie. Your mother and Lottie are up in my room, using the sewing machine. I—I wanted to be alone."

Allie threw her coat on the bed. "I don't mind."

"It's—warm out here."

"Oh, Minnie—" Allie couldn't help herself. "Oh, Minnie, how can you like him? I hate, hate, *hate* him! I'll never speak to him again. I don't care how hard Mother tries to make me. Even if he becomes a star boarder, I'll never, never . . ."

"Clyde?"

"Yes. He hit Jerry, and he made him—" No. She wouldn't tell about the crying. That would be disloyal. She wouldn't mention it to Jerry, either, next time she saw him. But she would certainly tell Minnie what kind of awful person Clyde Biskell was. . . .

By the time the defiant story was finished, Minnie's face was bleak. "Poor boy. Oh, poor, poor Jerry."

And Allie thought how strange it sounded to hear poor Minnie call someone else, "poor."

"He's gone, Allie."

"Who's gone?"

"Clyde. Mr. Biskell."

"Gone where?"

Minnie swallowed carefully. "To Los Angeles. He came home this afternoon and packed. He and—Miss Hempstead are going to open a school together down there. Clyde doesn't think the authorities up here will bother with—with whatever it is that would bring him back to face the charges. Of course, Southern California is the logical place for a drama school. He and Miss Hempstead—"

Softly, quietly, poor Minnie began to cry.

Allie watched her. And knew, reluctantly, another thing.

Grown-ups . . . grown-ups could be helpless and lost, too.

Chapter Twenty

ALLIE would give Jerry exactly one week, she planned. Then she would call him. She had saved up so many things to tell him. . . .

She bet he didn't know about old Biscuit running away.

And Mother had gotten a key for the telephone box—the telephone man was being fired from his job, so he'd sold the key to Mother for five dollars—which meant that no one in the family had to have a nickel to use the telephone any more.

The key worked so easy, too. You just unlocked the coin box, it swung open, and there was the slot that you pressed. The operator said, "Number, please?" and that's all there was to it. Of course, the boarders didn't know about it. It was to be kept secret, like the electric-meter thing. Or they'd all go to jail.

But she could tell Jerry. . . .

Allie had thought up a dance for Jerry, too. Not the steps; he'd have to do those; but the costume, and the music.

"Spooky music," was the way she would tell Jerry. "And you standing in the spotlight, dressed like a scare-crow, see? You'll have straw sticking out of your sleeves; your head will be hanging; you're all limp.

"Then the music brings you to life, and you sway. You start dancing—droopy, of course, because you're stuffed with straw. . . ."

Why didn't Jerry call her? It would be five days today. And she'd said she'd give him one week. . . .

Allie got the telephone key and called the hotel.

"The Tutmans checked out last Sunday," the switchboard clerk said.

Allie didn't believe it. She skated down to investigate. The clerk was very sure. And no, there was no forwarding address. She skated over to the foyer of the theater where Bobette had worked, and checked over the pictures of the chorus girls.

Then she believed. Where Bobette's dark, pretty face had been displayed, a ringleted blonde now stared back at Allie.

There was still the mailman. . . .

But no letters, no postcards came for Alice Barton. Maybe—

"They're probably addressed to Allison Reed," she told the surprised mailman. "That's me, too."

One dreary day succeeded another. Poor Minnie wandered around the house, and added to the weight of gloom.

"Like a ghost," Aunt Lottie said. "A ghost." Really, a tonic might do them all good. Perhaps a little port wine?

Mother said no.

Drue arranged for a job for Minnie at DRUSCILLA'S, MODISTE. Drue said she could always use a clever sewer.

After her work, Minnie tried to help around the house, but Lottie and Mother wouldn't let her.

"You stay in with the boarders, Minnie. Talk to Mr. Webster. He's really awfully nice, once you get to know him."

Minnie shook her head tiredly.

"Look," Aunt Lottie said, "maybe you should bob your hair. It's so heavy . . . the weight of it may be sapping your strength. Want to try it?"

"I'll curl it for you," Mother offered. "Soft little curls all over your head; and I'd fluff it out around your face. . . ."

"No." Minnie looked as if she'd never heard of bobbed hair. "No. Lil—Lottie, please stop worrying about me. I've been wanting to tell you. Next month, I'm going up to Sacramento. There's

a job opening up there in a department store, on the twenty-second. Doing alterations. I—I think I'd like to get away."

Neither Mother nor Aunt Lottie argued.

Aunt Maxine came over to spend an afternoon. She was a good sport about the jellies; she never mentioned them once. But she did say that she, for one, was glad and relieved that Allie was now out of that theatrical school atmosphere. She had never approved, she told Mother.

"That kind of thing wears a child out, makes her grow up too soon. You can't tell me it wouldn't make her old before her time. And we want our Allie to be sweet, fresh—and girlish."

"Girlish!" Allie thought. "Girlish."

And then Clyde Biskell came back to the house.

He was brought back, really. In an ambulance.

Allie missed seeing it, because of being kept after school; but she got into the kitchen in time to hear Mother and Aunt Lottie talking about it. Aunt Lottie must have just gotten in from work; she still wore her hat.

"Lil! Didn't you have any idea that Minnie was going out to City and County Hospital to get him?"

"Not the slightest. Minnie got a letter this morning from Hanna Hempstead, saying that she'd sent Clyde up here to San Francisco—"

"Why up here?"

"Because he wasn't a resident of Los Angeles County, and could not get free hospitalization there, and Hempstead didn't see why she should be expected to pay."

"But who paid for sending him up here, Lil?"

"Hempstead must have. I guess she figured it was the cheapest way of getting rid of him."

"What's wrong with Clyde?"

"A stroke. He can't talk. He's pretty helpless."

"Oh, Gawd." Aunt Lottie sat down in a chair. "And poor

Minnie will take care of him. For years and years and years. Lil, remember Drue's Aunt Gertrude and the man who came to fix her roof? It's the same situation. . . ."

Minnie came into the kitchen. "The doctor—I mean the intern—is with Clyde now. I've put Clyde in the hall bedroom; I'll sleep on the parlor sofa, if I may. . . . I just wanted to tell you I'll pay for Clyde—I have some money left. . . ."

"We're not worrying about that," Aunt Lottie said crossly, "but about you."

"Don't," Minnie said. "Don't."

A young man in a white coat came into the kitchen, then, and said that Mr. Biskell was resting easily.

"He may snap out of this," he said cheerfully. "Sometimes they do. The paralysis is just partial; the stroke wasn't too severe. Good nursing; light, but nourishing, meals are indicated. I'll drop in from time to time. Good evening."

Aunt Lottie took off her hat, put on her apron, and helped Mother. Minnie fixed a tray of tea and cinnamon toast, and took it upstairs for Mr. Biskell.

Lottie looked after her. "The stroke wasn't too severe," she repeated, "he may recover. Hmph. Clyde Biskell *will* get better; you wait and see, Lil. And he'll give Minnie a wonderful speech; pat her shoulder; call her his right-hand-bower and—stray off." Aunt Lottie banged a pan.

Allie never saw Mr. Biskell. She didn't want to.

She heard all the news, anyhow, because Aunt Lottie had told the intern to make his calls on Saturdays. She said she might as well consult him about her varicose, since he was coming right to the house. . . .

"Elastic stockings," she complained to Mother, later. "That's all he knows to recommend."

"He's just a student," Mother reminded her. "Maybe he hasn't studied varicose; maybe he hasn't come to that, yet."

"Well, he's not much of a doctor. He's not doing Clyde much

good, either. Anyone can see that. He's failing, Clyde is. And he tries so *hard* to talk. . . ."

"Minnie doesn't seem worried, Lottie."

"Because she wants to believe that he's better. Lil, have you noticed? Minnie looks almost—dedicated, these days."

"I know. Taking care of him, fixing his trays. . . ."

"Some women are like that, Lil. They like their men helpless, dependent."

Allie thought Mother and Aunt Lottie were wrong. When Allie had asked Minnie about the job in Sacramento, Minnie had said she was still planning to take it.

"But if Bis—Mr. Biskell is still—"

Minnie had looked at her. "Allie— Clyde can't live."

Clyde Biskell died on the second Saturday.

The intern came down from Mr. Biskell's room and out to the kitchen. He put his bag down on a chair. He looked young and bewildered.

"This has surprised me, all right," he said. "He shouldn't have—at least, not so soon. The vocal cords were paralyzed, of course, but not the digestive . . . Listen. This Minnie, who nursed him, did she feed him well? And often?"

"She certainly did," Aunt Lottie said. "You should have seen the trouble she went to."

The intern shook his head. "She'd have known if he was refusing food. She's not dumb. . . ."

Aunt Lottie dropped the saucer she had been about to set on the table. "No," she said. "Minnie's—not dumb."

"Well," the intern picked up his bag. "Well, good-bye. I guess the malnutrition was a natural part of his condition. If I didn't know it was impossible, I'd say Biskell starved to death. Oh. About those varicose veins. Why don't you come out to the Friday clinic and have one of our doctors look you over?"

"I will," Aunt Lottie said. "I sure will."

She waited until she heard the front door close, then she turned to Mother.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! And I'm not swearing, Lil."

Mother's voice was faint. "Where is Minnie?"

"Still upstairs—with him. Oh, Gawd, Lil, can you see it? She never gave him . . ."

"Don't! Lottie—don't." Mother looked white. "What—what are we going to do?"

"Nothing. Not a damn thing. We keep our mouths shut. She'll be going up to Sacramento. But that quiet little thing, passing judgment, carrying it out. . . ." Aunt Lottie stopped talking as she saw Allie, and she said, queerly, "—that *child*!"

"Allie!" Mother demanded sternly, "how long have you been standing there?"

"I—I just came in. Just this minute, Mother."

"Aunt Lottie and I were talking about—we were discussing something that happened up in Reedstown—years ago—"

"Sure, Mother." Allie looked down to mask her face. "Sure," she said again, tonelessly.

She turned away, walked unsteadily out to her room.

She had learned another thing.

Sometimes . . . Sometimes grown-ups took care of their own.

Chapter Twenty-one

DRUE said she thought Allie was looking peaked. Her face was too thin; her eyes were too big.

"Spring fever," Mother said.

"I think it's her age working on her," Aunt Lottie said. "The kid's growing up."

"I am not," Allie said crossly. "I won't *be* grown up."

"See? What did I tell you?" Aunt Lottie nodded wisely. "Moody, irritable, and short-tempered."

Allie felt that there was some excuse for her crossness. Mother and Aunt Lottie were so inconsistent these days. Part of the time they'd tell Allie to please remember that she was a big girl now; much too big to go skating and racketing all over the city. But the rest of the time—when, for instance, she wanted to go to the show alone at night—they told her to please remember that she was, after all, just a little girl.

It was very confusing. You never knew quite where you stood.

"Maybe Allie needs a vacation," Drue suggested. "I'm driving up to Oroville next week-end. The Memorial Day holiday comes in there; gives me an extra day. If you'd let her go, Lillian, I'd love to take Allie along."

Mother looked worried. "Automobiles. And that's a long way—"

"The roads are fine now. And you know I'm a good driver. Allie and I would stay at my Aunt Gertrude's."

Drue's Aunt Gertrude, Allie thought. Wasn't there something about . . . ? She had no time to remember it now; she had to add her impassioned pleas to the argument.

"Please, Moth-er. Oh, *please*."

"But Allie's school. . . ."

"She won't miss any of it, Lillian. I have to be back in San Francisco early Monday morning."

"*Please*, Moth-er."

"Be a sport, Lil." Aunt Lottie said. "Let her go."

"All right," Mother said. "Allie's never gone on a trip before; it will be nice for her. But—take good care of her, Drue."

It was unbelievable fun—the long, adventurous trip. And Drue was a wonderful driver. Someday, she promised, she would teach Allie to drive an automobile.

When they got to Oroville, Drue's Aunt Gertrude turned out to be the most energetic and bustling lady that Allie had ever seen.

She welcomed them heartily, kissed them both, and hustled them into the house and said that dinner would be ready before they could say "Jack Robinson."

"Or Jack Davidson," she joked, and raised her voice. "Mr. Davidson, oh, Mr. Davidson, come along now. Druscilly's here, and dinner's all ready."

A merry-looking old man came trundling in from the kitchen in a wheel chair, and greeted them warmly. He seemed right at home; he evidently knew Drue well; he told her some of the things that had happened since her last visit. . . .

But who, Allie wondered, *was* he?

Later, when Mr. Davidson had propelled his chair out to the porch for his after-dinner smoke, and Allie and Drue were helping Aunt Gertrude with the dishes, Allie asked about him.

"Mr. Davidson?" Aunt Gertrude said. "Oh, he's the man who came to fix my roof."

Allie almost dropped the silverware she was drying. For as long as she could remember Aunt Lottie had been telling about that. Was it an honest-to-goodness story? Had it actually happened?

"Forty years ago," Aunt Gertrude said briskly. "He was passing down the road, and I called out to him. 'There's something wrong with my roof,' I said. 'Maybe the leaves have stopped up the drain.' I was so afraid, you see, of my new wall-paper getting ruined by rain leaking in. He was the politest man. 'I'll climb up and see for you,' he said. Well, after he got up on the roof, he slipped and fell all the way to the ground. Hurt his back. Never walked again."

"And you—took care of him? All these years?"

"Certainly." Aunt Gertrude scoured the sink vigorously. "My fault, wasn't it?" She stopped scrubbing for a moment, to muse. "You know, though, sometimes I wonder what my life would have been like if—forty years ago—I hadn't called out to him."

Allie tried to puzzle it out—lying in bed in the neat, spare bedroom that night. There was something here; something one should know. . . . Even the story part, hearing it for years, then finding out it was a real-life story. . . . If she wasn't so sleepy. . . . Pattern? Was it a pattern—working itself out?

It was on the last day of their visit that Johnny King came by to see if Aunt Gertrude had any errands for him to do.

"Johnny goes up to the dam every day," she explained. "He passes right through Reedstown, and some days I send—"

"Reedstown?" Allie exclaimed, "are we *that* close to Reedstown?"

"Child, didn't you know? It's just up the mountains."

"Oh, Drue, could we go by that way, going home? If I could just see. . . ."

Drue shook her head. "Allie, there's nothing there any more. You'd be terribly disappointed."

"Please, Drue. Oh, I must. . . ."

"How about me taking her with me now?" Johnny King offered. "I'd have her back by three o'clock."

Drue looked as worried and uncertain as Mother had.

"Druscilly," Aunt Gertrude said, "you go along, too."

"No," Drue said quickly. "No. I never like going back—nothing. All right, Johnny, you can take her; she'll never be satisfied unless she sees for herself. But you drive as if Allie were a cargo of eggs, you hear me? I promised her mother . . ."

Johnny King was fun to drive with, too. He didn't know a single thing about Reedstown; and he made an appreciative audience for the stories Allie could tell him.

"Imagine that," he marveled. "Imagine that. And I've always thought of it as just an old ghost town." He braked the car. "Out you go. You'll have about fifteen minutes to look around. I'll go on up to the dam, pick you up on my way back."

He leaned out of the window to yell back at her. "Don't wander off. These hills are honeycombed with old mining shafts. Wouldn't want you to fall down one. . . ."

Allie stood uncertainly. But where was the town? There was nothing here. Just one oddly-crumpled building, its roof caved in as if something heavy had pushed it. She saw part of a faded, hand-lettered sign: "Post Office."

Dismayed, she turned to call Johnny King back, but his car had disappeared. Allie took a deep breath, and tried to stop shivering. She would stand right here until Johnny came back for her. The stillness, the quiet wilderness, the green emptiness—they were cold and frightening things. No houses. No people. . . .

Yes. One person. An old, old man was shuffling down the road, carrying two bouquets of scraggly flowers.

His "Howdy," was polite, and inquisitive.

"Please—" Allie's voice squeaked, so she tried again. "Please, is this—Reedstown?"

"What's left of it. We had a bad fire back in '17; burned out most of the old houses. No water." He jerked his head. "A few houses left—around the turn."

"Have—have you lived here long?"

"Born and raised here. I sorta—watch out for things. No one else much left to do it." He gestured with the flowers. "Like today. Decoration Day. I'm taking these up to the cemetery. For the Barton lads. Harry Barton's boys; died back in—"

Allie made a shocked, unbelieving sound, and the old man peered at her curiously.

"You heard tell of the Bartons?" he asked. "Old Will Barton—I mind the winter's night he drove the stage clear to Oroville to get a doctor—"

"I know," Allie breathed.

"That was for Harry's youngest boy," the old man concluded patiently.

Allie was able to nod. The coldness was beginning to leave her. And the wilderness didn't seem empty or frightening any more. It was full of life and of warmth. . . .

The old man stared at her. "Say," he said suddenly, "you have a look about you . . . your eyes are like . . . Say, looky here—you must be Harry Barton's girl!"

Allie's throat swelled, and she wondered that almost unbearable happiness could make one cry so. . . .

"Oh, yes," she said. "Yes. I'm Harry Barton's girl."

Chapter Twenty-two

TRUE to her promise, Drue had Allie back in San Francisco by Monday morning. She let her off at the ferry building.

"I wish I had time to take you straight home," Drue said. "I'd feel much better, delivering you right to your door. But I *have* got that important appointment. . . . Allie, are you sure your mother won't mind your taking the street-car?"

"I go on them all the time, Drue. Really."

"All right. Tell Mother I'll be out tonight." Drue smiled fondly. "You *are* looking better, Allie. The trip did you good."

"It was a *wonderful* trip! Thank you for taking me."

She waved as Drue drove away. Someday, perhaps, she would be able to tell Drue what had happened to her up in Reedstown. Although even Drue might not believe . . . It was so like a story, like a strange, imagined story. . . .

But Aunt Gertrude's story, Allie remembered, had turned out to be true. . . .

Allie sat on a fire-plug and watched the street-cars coming down Market Street. She could take a Number 7, a Number 6, or a Number 17 home. With that many to choose from, she could take her time, wait for a satisfactory crowd.

Of course she intended to ride free. She didn't have a nickel in change, and it would be foolish to break into the shiny silver dollar Drue had given her.

Aunt Lottie said that once you broke a dollar into change, it just faded away. Allie thought happily of Mother and Aunt

Lottie. She had missed them. It would be so good to walk into the house—into the warm kitchen.

Allie looked again at the silver dollar, balanced it in her hand. She could sure use that dollar; three of her skate wheels were worn to the rims. And she needed new straps, too.

But what if—? Could Aunt Lottie be right? *Was* Allie getting too big for skates? It would be awful to spend the money, then not get the good out of it. It wouldn't be practical.

Mother was very practical. . . .

"You must be Harry Barton's girl," the old man had said. Allie liked to remember that. It was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to her.

And yet— And yet—she was Lillian Barton's girl, too.

Allie stood up. Why had she ever wanted to be "Allison Reed, of Reedstown"? This was infinitely better. She was Allie Barton of San Francisco.

And someday, she would be able to say about her town, "Yes. I mind the day they—" well, something. Built some new building, or tore down a famous old one. . . .

Allie walked restlessly back and forth, jiggled the silver dollar in her hand. Maybe—maybe she was getting too big to sneak free street-car rides, too?

Absently, she watched the Number 7 street-car approach, swing into the turn, and stop. She made her decision. It might not be too bad, after all—growing up.

Allie stood in line with the waiting passengers, took her proper turn. She mounted the car steps primly, and looked the conductor straight in the eye.

She made quite a ceremony of handing over her dollar.

But the conductor accepted it grudgingly. "Change, change," he grumbled, in a soft, south-of-Market accent, "always change. Next thing, they'll be handin' me fi' dollar bills."

"Listen," Allie said indignantly, "listen, you're lucky to be getting that!"

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